

## **Savage (Tales from a long walk!)**

### **Prologue**

At 3:10am the shadowy figure dressed in black and wearing the obligatory cap and carrying a bag that, should it have been a reasonable hour and light, might have been mistaken for a swag bag emerged onto the street. Glancing at the timer on his phone – 5 minutes to go, no curtains twitched – the sensible were sound asleep, the majority of WCC's youngsters were probably partying in town.

He had concerns and felt nervous but what could go wrong? No one had noticed him so far. And with that lights appeared, the task in hand lay ahead and he slipped easily into the seat of the dark vehicle arranged to reach the rendezvous point in good time. There was no surprise on the face of the driver, he too was ready to go bang, bang – but the prophetic 1<sup>st</sup> words of the day were, it has to be said, unusual....."have you smothered the Vaseline well Smudge?"

So, by 3:30 two more walkers gathered at The Royal Oak having endured months of high intensity training in their dreams. Realisation of the Real Thing (and we're not talking Coke here) was upon us and 40 miles lay ahead....if only Marty McFly could have been available to whisk us into the future, pain could so easily have been avoided.

### **Leg 1 – Whitwell – Carlton in Lindrick**

With Tesco's financial future looking somewhat rosier, a direct result of Vaseline/Compeed© sales in S43 throughout June, registration formalities were completed, T Shirts secured and badges applied. All tactical discussions were hushed in respect of the neighbours until of course Mr Heath greeted all and sundry determined he could match the noise of a pneumatic drill.

3:58am and after an impeccably observed minutes silence the walkers left the Oak car park with a swift right/left chicane and onwards up Hillside – luckily the traffic lights were on green so no untoward tickets needed to be issued. Settling into small groups but towards the rear of the field we left Whitwell behind after remembering to switch on the Siri/Cortana timer (other phone products are available) some half a mile into the walk. She was in for a challenging day.

The morning was glorious and relatively peaceful as by the time we passed Netherthorpe Airfield, Mr Heath was some distance back and luckily hedgerows have an ability to dampen sound. By the time Turner Wood was achieved concern grew that the pace we were setting ourselves was a tad on the fast side despite the likelihood that the front runners were probably tucking into their 1<sup>st</sup> Bacon Roll of the day. I should heed my thoughts.

As we passed through Lindrick Dale and on past the golf course thoughts turned to a glorious April day, the route taking us past the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> hole of Lindrick Golf Club – or as I know them Par, Bogey, Par. Could I win my way around this walk as I had beaten all before me on that day? Possibly as, so far, no concerns were arising from any body parts. Alas it was too early and with no flags on the greens a quick pitch & putt was out of the question – nor did I stand much chance as Trevor & Joe were witnessed for the 1<sup>st</sup> time offering all encouragement.

Edging around Woodsetts AI and I were now 2-3 fields behind one WCC team of front runners who, thanks to a vest a sniper could see & take aim at from a mile away, could be seen setting a good pace – although this was to be no match for the Hatton's who were clearly to the LSW what Russia have been to the World Cup – they were walking for us!

As we traversed the solid mud outcrop resembling the surface of Mars by the equestrian centre conditions were somewhat better than the fateful practice day back in February when, at the time, the mud had so easily covered the top of my boots leading to a near collapse and total embarrassment. That over and we were on the home straight to the 1<sup>st</sup> checkpoint. As was to become the norm the welcome was warm, friendly and noisy. Fruit and Jelly Babies on board and with 1 or 2 blisters between the team nothing was going to get in our way. Certainly not Leg 2.

## **Leg 2 – Carlton In Lindrick – Ranby**

With the field thinning out Al and I set a steady pace in keeping with the quartet of Heath, birthday girl Wheatley, Foster and May – a better firm of solicitors you could not name. Clearly their approach was a simple one – your speed is determined by and is directly proportional to Hannah’s need for the toilet – Drakes and I would struggle to keep up!

Crossing the fields leading to the main Worksop/Blyth road the difference between the winter training walks and Summer reality was staggering. We were practically walking on sand instead of inches of mud whilst the caravan storage area was practically invisible.

With Joe & Trevor again supporting through Scofton spirits were good but it took strength to avoid a quick walk through the water and remain on dry land. Joining the towpath of the Chesterfield canal again had my mind contemplating the feats humans are capable of and the decisions they make. Why on earth, when there was nothing spoiling, did the Navvies see fit to introduce so many bends on the canal when a nice straight line would see us in Ranby a lot sooner?

The sounds of the A1 mean 2 things – 1) it’s getting later...and warmer and 2) you’re nearly at the next checkpoint. Soon after the Chequers Inn had saluted us from the opposite bank we emerged to another fine welcome and this time a Sausage Cob to keep those pangs at bay. Strange though for a horsebox to be so strategically placed and for the owner to be scrubbing it down due to a series of smears whilst muttering something about Smudges filthy wobblers – goodness knows what went on there.

With a brief outline of timings provided by the evergreen, and in this instance ever early, support of Mr Jessop Leg 3 beckoned.

## **Leg 3 – Ranby – Retford Rugby Club**

Returning to the towpath it became clear that England was springing to life as other local walkers were sighted and were a bit bemused that their morning constitutional on this Saturday was akin to walking the wrong way along the M25. Approaching Green Mile Lane from the canal thoughts turned to a nice rest at Retford although we were a little apprehensive, in practice this leg had been one of our least favourites mainly due to the short hill that leads up to the mini roundabout. Add to that the fact that on passing one of the routed footpaths a week or so earlier the ‘right of way’ was clearly impassable our hope was that early walkers would have, like Double Diamond, worked wonders and cleared a route.

Green Mile Lane is basically made longer by the fact that you are constantly up hill & down dale and is currently reminiscent of the sand dunes at Mablethorpe. With vegetation noticeably longer we approached Babworth Church where I would have gladly thieved the leaf blower being used in the vicinity had it been a strimmer. Despite earlier efforts the stinging nettles were on fine form on this short stretch. Rumours of David Bellamy filming a documentary about finding the lesser known ‘Little Foz’ in the undergrowth were unfounded as we reached our nemesis that is the short climb to Retford as a small group. Joined by Julia and Sarah I have, at least, found an excuse for starting to feel a touch of cramp as I think they upped the anti a little by taking my swag bag for a short while and I was like a gazelle – being chased by a tortoise! Worried.

Quite a long stop – Quite a big mistake

## **Leg 4 – Retford Rugby Club – Elkesley**

Within 100 metres we knew, from here on in it would be hard work. We let our timings drop off but Siri/Cortana was keeping track. To humour ourselves we determined any golf ball found on Retford Golf Club worth over £1.50 would be pocketed, clearly members take more care of their balls than Smudge, as none were to be found.

The feet were beginning to be felt as were the leg muscles as we entered unknown walking distance territory. Passing the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> hole on Retford Golf club, or as I know them double bogey, triple bogey and lucky bogey respectively (we'll skip the results of that day) I soon learned that downhill pressure on the knees is worse than a nice gentle uphill climb.

A short distance beyond the golf course, and more mysteriously as the fancy dress shop owner in Mr Benn, the intrepid photographer appeared on the lane ahead of us and, like most of my life when a camera is pointed there is a steadfast refusal to smile. Despite my best efforts the photographer still managed to make me look 6 months pregnant, testament to his expertise.

As per every other time we have walked this stretch – that would be once then – the dogs on Morton Grange let loose with their barking. With 100 or so walkers going past that day the suppliers of Doggy throat lozenges must have been very happy indeed – whilst the neighbours perhaps not as much. At this point I was seeking reasons for the pain we were beginning to feel as clearly a lack of fitness could not be one of them. Number one being that the lane out of Morton Grange had been lengthened since the practice walk whilst another theory was that my hands were growing. Some thoughts were clearly fanciful – the hands were not!

Another welcoming committee awaited at the caravan sales area as well as some sound advice to wave my arms above my head a la “The funky Gibbon” dance for those of a certain age. This would hold me in good stead for the (long) remainder of the day. Despite huge temptation to see if a van could be rented for a couple of hours well deserved kip a sense of duty prevailed, as did a little bit of Green & Blacks finest Salted Caramel chocolate and we were on our way again

#### **Leg 5 (Is that as far as we've got) – Elkesley - Bothamsall**

With tender feet it was nice to have the relief of a stretch off tarmac underfoot so that all that could be experienced was the effects of friction instead of feeling each stone I trod on. Walking behind Elkesley we neared the wood that in March had been turned into the Everglades and was only passable with a paddle – oh how nice for a repeat but it was not to be; nor could I have bent down to remove my shoes. What had been a raging River Poulter in practice had become a trickle of a stream though fish were still visible. Clearly having enjoyed, in March time, some tasty nibbles from the feet of Forrest & Draycott they were after desserts.

By this point you will have noticed little mention of fellow walkers as we dropped off the pace and a lot of the walk sections were now as a pair alone fighting the elements but one of my favourite stretches was to hand. Exiting the woods after the stream and uphill – turn around and the picture is like one of those chocolate box covers of the 70's – not Milk Tray – Dairy Box. Beautiful, though a little less sun would have enhanced the picture a little.

That over it's through the farm and along tracks and onto Bothamsall and a steely determination that the socks had to be changed and to hell with seeing my feet. Welcomed from afar having been careful to avoid seeking sanctuary in the church Checkpoint 5 was upon us. Lovely.

Pineapple down the neck and with all and sundry running about after us a strategic combination of Rachel and the overall bedecked medical team applied blister plasters and then bravely I administered new socks over blisters I didn't know I had. I'd love to say the relief was instant – though I hate lying Leg 6 and then only 10 or so miles to go.

#### **Leg 6 – Bothamsall – Clumber Park Hotel**

Adopting a new tactic of looking at the ground when climbing uphill the walk out of Bothamsall was surprisingly painless, not entirely true but it is fair to say there was no more pain than what was already being experienced. With little (NO) danger of any speeding as we left the village boundaries we crossed more fields before joining a series of tracks/lanes adjacent to the oil pumps that would eventually lead to the woods beyond which Clumber Park Hotel awaited.

The lanes themselves were scattered with chippings that regularly introduced themselves to the sole of our boots which invariably led to the air being turned quite blue. As the shade of the woods was welcomed a further comfort break was needed before we made our final approach to the checkpoint. Turning the corner to the CPH several mattresses teased but failed to stop us as we walked across the car park – and a further welcome from Joe & Trevor who, credit to them, looked as fresh as daisies.

One of WCC's finest, and part of today's walk, had celebrated his own nuptials at this fine venue but was well ahead of us. A pity then as a reminder of his own celebrations, that might have seen a tear to his eye (weddings are so expensive!), began in front of us. As the radiant blonde bride in a cream off the shoulder number, was driven past us in a horse and carriage my thoughts strayed – wondering if her heels were any more comfortable than my boots, they probably were.

Preparations for rising from the camp chairs began in earnest for Al and I and with that achieved, further encouragement from the support staff and after a warm handshake from Joe & Trevor we gained pace across the car park as Leg 7 beckoned.

### **Leg 7 – Clumber Park Hotel – Trumans Lodge**

With safety always at the forefront of all our decision making we reckoned a gap of a mile between traffic would be sufficient to see us across the main road and into the grounds of Clumber Park and the shade that would eventually come. Before the shade however there was a mile or so of open fields and roads to cover and with a bit of a breeze blowing, and the dessertesque features of the fields, an awful lot of dust was blowing into our face.

Crossing the Ford via the bridge we were briefly stopped by supporters for photo's – thanks mum – before excusing ourselves as seizure set in and entered Hardwick Village. Passing the coffee stop due to the queue's and then, for the same reason (but with more sadness) taking the same action at the Ice Cream Van we headed into the woods having crossed the lake. The dilemma now was honesty or go for a short cut but honest as the day is (really verrrry) long we took the left trail uphill and with a right headed towards Lime Tree Avenue.

As we waited to cross the road at LTA a pain shot through, what had been until this point my least troublesome, right foot. Gingerly, moving forward I was now worried if I could complete the journey but the words were not spoken and after a few more steps the pain eased a little. Tactics were discussed as to whether a short stop was needed at Trumans Lodge or a full foot review – working on the premise it would still hurt regardless of what we did we opted for the short stop – in our case this would mean a good 10-15 minutes!

On the final haul to the stop sherpas Sarah & Julia Draycott were again on hand to take our bags for the last 500 metres or so and as we sat we knew there was just 7 or 8 miles ahead of us.

### **Leg 8 – Trumans Lodge – South Lodge**

We head towards Drinking Pit Lane but now I'm reliant on my wingman 'Ice' Draycott for directions as my practice has not covered the final 2 sectors. We are joined on this leg by Julia whos support is most welcome particularly as she now has both bags over her shoulders.

As we cross the main road a bike comes over the brow of the hill that forces me onto the slowest jog ever witnessed by man – something a tortoise might describe as a brisk walk. That said though we may need to extend our traffic gaps whenever we next encounter a road. Beyond the road we become aware of a missing voice – no more timing checks. We think the phone has died but quite frankly our pace is slowing so much Cortana/Siri has probably taken pity on us.

Does DPL ever end? So many times, there's a break in the trees, a bend that you are convinced as you go around it will become the next checkpoint but no – the track just goes on and on and on until another steep downhill section that Franz Klammer would make mincemeat of but my knees hate it. There are some spectacular tree root structures visible but I still can't see the checkpoint but as you

bottom out its there – the final stop and just under 5 miles to go. Again, our resident photographer expertly captures the pain I'm feeling but come hell or high water I'm going to make it.

A final rest, several cups of squash and a bit of banana cake, top up the bottles for the final time and the last leg is all that stands between us and glory....surely we can't be headed away from Whitwell!

### **Leg 9 – South Lodge – Heaven (The Royal Oak, Whitwell)**

We are headed away from Whitwell and with Worksop Manor in the distance and the sun overhead the last 4 miles will take a while, our focus becomes the next step and then the one after that. We pass Jo who is struggling but she'll make it I'm sure.

If walking away from Whitwell was bad only a sadist could have designed public footpaths in this neck of the woods with so many styles – each starts with a pull up and a very, very gentle step down that in all honesty feels like an explosion of pain. Somewhere, most probably on Wikipedia (after I add it) will mention that Hodthorpe has more styles per head of the population than anywhere else in the UK.

But now we head towards Whitwell and the law of averages tells me that it can't all be uphill but it is – how? I don't remember the constant downhills. Teamwork and ingenuity allow us to recover a dropped walking stick and set of instructions without the need to bend down before we reach another style that then allows us to cross the A60. Having taken the precaution of asking the police (force – not Sting) to stop traffic between Worksop & Cuckney we head uphill towards the back of Hodthorpe.

The stile that leads to the train track at Hodthorpe MUST be the steepest in the country but we get over it. No trains are visible as, again for safety sake all trains have been stopped between London and Edinburgh Waverley so we crossed the line and headed into The Best Kept. With bags jettisoned we sprightly (ahem!) moved along Mill Walk/Lane before the final kick in the you know what's as we headed UP Hangar Hill, took a left and yet more uphill.

After a short respite we are upon the final ascent – its Bakestone Moor or bust. I've done this hill hundreds of times and one more isn't going to hurt – well of course it us but the pain can wait. Head down and we reach the summit having passed the Jubilee/Franklin interchange and we go over the top. There is immediate noise – and then I get it, this is what the LSW is all about.

The applause starts and as we reach Sandy Lane (being careful to check the lights are on Green) – how do I hold back tears? I'll never know but the emotions of that last 100metres or so will be with me forever as I cross the line a la the Brownlee brothers with my companion for the day Alan 'Ice' Draycott. A huge welcoming committee is beyond words, beyond belief, beyond relief! It's done.

I'm exhausted but nearly everyone will make it and without the support I know I wouldn't be one of them. But a rest and some soup and squash is in order, the boots (eventually) come off – thanks Smudge – and words of congratulations are offered, received and returned. Is it over? The time to depart nears and I stand but the legs are gone. Where's the car dear? – at your mums just around the corner (this I know) and then I cry as it involves at least 2 steps....up!

### **Epilogue**

The once shadowy figure emerges from the car shuffling one foot in front of the other. It was impossible to determine where the blisters finished and the blister plasters started (thankfully the Vaseline was gone). No work shoes are possible and plimsolls or trainers are the order of the day. Questions are asked in parliament as to why cars have clutches – evidently a punishment for those that walk 40 miles in a day. The house(work) remains untouched but he is home. It's still painful but the pain will subside – after all it is only the Thursday, just 5 days after the LSW.

And it does go but the memories never will.