

Tales From A Novice – Louise Smalley Walk 2018

When Whitwell Cricket Club were lucky enough to be chosen as the 2018 recipients, it was felt that some of us from the club should show a bit of willing and do the walk ourselves. As a keen walker over shorter distances I was quick to volunteer and training began in earnest in February. All was going well until the cricket season started, and a couple of injuries stopped me in my tracks so it was only a month before walk day that I was 100% about taking part. My fellow WCC comrades on the day were Doob, Sailor, Robbo, Panda, Amy, Foz, Hannah, Drakes, Martin, Wayne and JP.

We registered at the Royal Oak at 3.30am after not much sleep on my part, up early to apply plenty of Vaseline to my nether regions. I ignored the lure of the beer pumps at the bar and instead settled for a glass of orange, a banana and some chocolate biscuits. I spotted my footballing hero Bri Wheatley at this stage, a Jug & Glass FC legend. If the fittest man in Derbyshire could complete the walk why couldn't I? After a quick visit to the toilet – which was to be a regular theme throughout the day – it was 4am and we were away. By the time we reached Whitwell Wood we were walking in single file and had split up into four splinter groups; my companions for the next 39 miles would be Doob, Sailor and Robbo. I had my second wee of the walk at this point.

There was little excitement to report on a very pleasant morning as we passed Netherthorpe Airfield and Turner Wood. Despite being some way in front of Panda we could still hear him. We even managed to cross the railway line without being hit by a train which was a bonus. Despite almost taking our first wrong turn of the day and ending up in a quarry, we approached Lindrick Dale while discussing what a metallised road was. None of us knew. We crossed the A57 but here we required guidance from some more experienced walkers, as we couldn't find the magic entrance to the wood which was hidden behind a bus stop. Where this path had taken us we weren't too sure, as the next houses we passed had rocket launchers and jump jets in the grounds. As we marched past Woodsetts I stopped for another comfort break. For this I can blame Joe as I maybe had taken his advice to stay well hydrated too far. On a perfect morning for walking we approached Carlton in Lindrick and followed the smell of sausage and bacon to Checkpoint 1.

After a quick refuel we pressed on towards Scofton and Osberton, debating the merits of Radio 1 and 2 as we went with Sailor as DJ. We also commented that we were making good time and discussed whether or not we could break the 12hr mark, an idea which was soon dismissed as fantasy. After joining the Chesterfield Canal I began to feel some chafing down below and knew that I would soon be reaching for the Vaseline again. We entered Ranby and passed behind the Chequers Pub as if just to tease us, with this being a very popular watering hole for us if we play cricket in the vicinity of Retford. At Checkpoint 2 more food and drink was taken on board, before I had to disappear behind a horsebox to apply the petroleum jelly.

We set off again led by pacesetter Robbo. With the temperatures rising and the sun shining I now reached for some headgear. We passed some racing rails and saw some horses being trained, a couple of which looked suspiciously like the donkeys I had picked at Royal Ascot during the week. One of the more entertaining bits of the day was now upon us as we passed Babworth Church, where the groundsman gave us the choice of two paths to get to the main road. With all four of us being first timers we decided to stick to the route prescribed in the directions, which in hindsight was an error. We hacked our way through 500yds of nettles and brambles, being stung from chin to shin on the way. The language here was extremely colourful, and video footage of Doob completing

the last twenty yards of the 'Babworth Stinger' is available for a small fee. With this out of the way, we reached Checkpoint 3 at Retford RUFC without further alarm and my toilet stops now totalled 7 or 8.

The next stage was a bit of a struggle as tiredness in the legs began to set in and as the groups began to thin out there weren't many people around. The mood was lightened as we wandered through Retford GC and reminisced about golf days we have had there in the past and how nice the steak & ale pie was in the clubhouse. After this there wasn't much to look at, but we soon emerged onto a main road and ploughed on towards Checkpoint 4 at Caravan UK. This was the least pleasant stop of the day as there was a plague of black insects that seemed particularly attracted to my orange bag. Doob and Robbo took this chance to drop off their bags, but I kept mine with me as the only things of any weight in there were bananas and bottles of water.

We were now entering the darkest period of the walk. As we crossed the A1 with tiring legs and Gamston Airport to our left, it dawned on us how far we were away from home. The next few miles seemed to be endless country paths with high hedgerows meaning we had nothing to look at and we must have gone two hours without seeing another soul. Robbo continued his attempts to whistle using a piece of long grass and we had used up all our cricket and World Cup talk; this was the only part of the day completed in silence and I wondered if I would make it to the end. And then out of nowhere appeared the village of Bothamsall. Was this a mirage? Alas no! With the sight of civilisation and some people, we were like new men as we marched into Checkpoint 5. After a few Ibuprofens and a quick bite to eat to give Doob a chocolate rush, we continued on.

The next part of the walk was a pleasant one across mostly open fields to Clumber Park Hotel, which brought back happy/sad memories (delete as appropriate) for one member of the group who had his wedding reception there. I stopped by a hedgerow for toilet break 12. Doob and Sailor approached this stage with renewed vigour as they had family waiting at the next checkpoint to cheer them in. With Robbo now installed as navigator, we had a slight mishap with the hotel in sight but we were soon back on track. In fairness the directions told us to look for a play area, when in actual fact it was just two tractor tyres and a bit of rope hanging from a tree.

When leaving Checkpoint 6 we had to dash between heavy traffic to cross the busy A614. The group wondered how Drakes would cope with this as judging quick singles on a Saturday afternoon is not normally his strongpoint. We were back in stride now and in good spirits as we entered Clumber Park itself. As we headed towards the ford a young tearaway overtook us on a mountain bike and headed straight into the ford as we waited with anticipation for him to fall off, but we were to be disappointed. The soft ground underfoot in the woods was very welcome with blisters on the feet starting to take hold. We were greeted at Checkpoint 7 by WCC President Craig Sadler, who declined to walk the last seven miles with us for some reason. The flapjack here proved a particular treat. It gave Robbo a boost as he bowled a few overs as we went to remind Captain Doob of his talent.

The next stage of the journey was almost solely comprised of a slog along Drinking Pit Lane. Despite being mostly downhill and a relatively short stage this did seem to drag on, and I managed at least two further toilet breaks here. When we saw a photographer we assumed we were near the end, but he told us we were still quite a way away. The next photographer added at least another twenty yards to my day, as I had to go back and re-walk the final approach to the checkpoint after the first

photo of me in my flowery hat was blurry! Banana loaf and Maoams were the order of the day as we sought sustenance for the final push and we soon departed from Checkpoint 8.

Not long into the final stage of the walk we could see Whitwell in the distance. Initially this proved something of a boost, but then it had the opposite effect as we appeared to be walking away from the Best Kept and heading towards Worksop Manor. With blisters now making every step feel like I was walking on broken glass this was not what I wanted. At this point I took my last comfort break of the day, with the final score being Toilet Stops 18 Bananas Consumed 16. After staggering across the A60 we struggled up through the fields behind Hodthorpe and encountered some very angry looking sheep. We successfully navigated another railway track and before we knew it we were back in Whitwell. Our target for the walk was 14hrs, but we knew now if we put our foot down we could break 13hrs. The final kick in the teeth came when we had to go up Hangar Hill and Doles Lane, when any sensible person would have gone downhill into the Square. Alas we aren't sensible and so we stuck to the directions, emerging from the (in)famous gennel next to the old Jug & Glass. Then it was up the hill and from here the Royal Oak and the welcoming committee were visible, and after shaking each other by the hand we checked in at base camp in 12hrs 50mins.

JP and Wayne were waiting for us fresh as daisies and looked like they could go round again. Panda, Amy, Foz and Hannah returned about half an hour after us. The final pairing of Drakes and Martin returned a while later but I cannot confirm exactly how long after because by now the Hop House lager had taken hold of my weary body. After cheering home the rest of the finishers I retired to the Sadlers B&B for a hot bath and some scrambled eggs. I awoke the next day walking like a tin man, but was still able to drag myself back to the Royal Oak for some live music, great company and of course more lager to relive the stories of the previous day.

I can't thank the support teams and everyone behind the scenes enough for what they did. Being cheered in and out of every checkpoint made a huge difference and put any doubts we had about finishing to the back of our minds. Big thanks also to Alan and Claire at the Royal Oak for providing a brilliant base for the walk which I am certain will continue to flourish in the years to come.

Written by:

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