

100 MILE WALK & FAMILY FUN DAY 2009

How do you improve on a sponsored walk over the distance of a marathon? By covering two marathons, perhaps? Maybe three if you really like to feel the burn. Not so the volunteers for the annual charity walk in aid of Cystinosis Foundation Ireland. Having found that the 26 miles of the 2008 walk left them with a bit to spare, this year they decided to dramatically up the ante by walking four marathons in three days.

Seven brave (foolish?!) men achieved this in the hottest few days of the year. The team was: Gary Pemberton (Good Cop), Paul Lambe (Bad Cop), Dave McRoy, Andrew Smyth, Rick Parmar, Chris Lambe and Rob

They were joined on the last day by Gerry Dunne, Sylvia Dunne and Andrew Curry who did 33 miles in solidarity with them – one complete marathon was inadequate!

They had planned their route with military precision, using the Grand Canal Run Route. However, their route maps did not show the overgrown and uneven paths which hampered every step they took. Their first day also saw temperatures of 30° C and at the end of the 35 miles the lads were very disheartened and began to question whether they had taken on too mammoth a task. They were exhausted, blistered, sunburnt, aching and battered – emotionally as well as physically. They decided to make a decision in the morning after a good night's sleep, seeing as their first night pre-race in Solihull was mostly sleepless due to noisy backpackers and Frank's thundering snores!. Still, they forgave him because they said he was their absolute life saver on that first day, appearing under bridges and round corners where they least expected him with cups of tea, bottles of water and various comforters for them.

Day 2 started off with a trip to the local chemist where they met a wonderful Pharmacist who dressed their blisters and advised them to stock up on blister plasters and painkillers. However, Rob improvised and found babywipes and sellotape saved the day for him! After their visit to the Field Hospital and some breakfast they set off much more gingerly and demoralised than their enthusiastic and spirited start the day before. Rick and Andrew are credited with keeping up everyone's spirits that day and pushing and encouraging them all. They all quickly developed a Neurofen "habit", once one of the weary walkers discovered it's welcomed numbing effect they were all soon hooked! By the end of day 2 and another 33 miles under their belts, their heads were up and they were sure they could achieve their goal.

Day 3 began at 4.30am as they wanted to reach the finish line at the Red Lion as early as they could. By all accounts Paul – the elder statesman of the group – would head off on his own and soon create a wide gap between him and the other six members of his team. There was much banter between them because of this and he earned the title “Bad Cop” because he was always the one exaggerating how much longer to go and telling they had better get a move on. The lads were delighted to see Paul forging ahead of them waving his stick like a knight with his jousting lance cocked ready for battle, only to disturb a flock of pigeons nesting in a bridge above his head. They couldn’t decide who got the bigger fright, and almost made a bigger mess, than Paul or the scattering birds!

Bear in mind these marathon men had to walk across country, down dual carriageways, canal paths and often had to answer a call of nature when there was no public convenience nearby. One of the younger members of the team could wait no longer and decided to use a tree as he was getting desperate. Mid-call he realised there was a family coming along the path towards him, obviously not wishing to offend them or potentially cause any public order offence he turned 180° - to face a barge full of tourists sailing past enjoying the summer sunshine and picturesque countryside!

The finish of the 100-mile walk formed the centrepiece of the annual Family Fun Day, which this year had a different venue but the same hosts as Ray and Jo welcomed all-comers to their new pub, the Red Lion in Charlton, Herdfordshire.

The length of 1,700 football pitches, 400 laps of an Olympic athletic track, 200,000 steps for the average person - it doesn't matter how you express it, 100 miles is a long, long way, so special credit has to go to the walkers, who really excelled themselves this year. Having set off from just outside Solihull in the Midlands on Thursday, they arrived to much applause from the large crowd at the Red Lion on a sunny Saturday afternoon.

The Fun Day featured plenty of stalls in the village green outside the pub, offering all sorts of entertainment, and if any of the visitors thought the sponsored walk was the afternoon’s biggest test of stamina, they hadn’t seen regular quizmaster Gary’s bumper picture quiz posted on the walls of the pub!

Fortunately for the walkers, who were no doubt in need of refuelling, there is never any danger of guests at the Fun Day going hungry and it was all hands on deck as friends and family served up a fine selection of food

throughout the day and night, with highlights including a pig donated by locals - which had been on the spit since 4am and was still having the last shreds of meat picked off it well into the night - and a giant paella.

As the afternoon turned to evening, the bands fired up and the large crowd danced away the last few hours of the Fun Day. And so another successful and enjoyable event drew to a close as the revellers slowly disappeared into the night, heading homeward with as many leftover burgers and sausages as they could carry.