

Katie's Shropshire Way Run 4 May 2019

Shrewsbury to Mainstone - just beyond Bishops Castle. Total distance 32.5 miles and a height gain of 4,370 feet.

I've recently started ultra-running, and where better to do my first 32 miles than on the Shropshire Way. With the help of my mum I managed to complete a 32 mile solo run over sections 1 and 2 of the Path on 4 May 2019.

A fair amount of planning had gone into the arrangements, mum was meeting me with refreshments at designated points and at the end.



My run started at Kingsland Bridge in Shrewsbury at 8.00am on 4 May 2019. I felt nervous but excited. I knew I had trained well but not on some of the terrain I was going to encounter and the unknown always leads to a few butterflies in the stomach.

The way marks helped right away. I was soon running along the Radbrook and being bombarded by the smell of the wild garlic, it was really pretty and looking fresh after the night's rain. After popping out onto Longden Road and crossing the old by pass you drop down into a large playing field where my feet became soaked through in minutes by the long grass but I was wearing wool socks which are warm wet or dry and there would be worse to come. I just had to get on with it.

The path takes you over the railway and into Meole Brace village, past the church and up to a road taking you over the bypass. A clearly marked gate takes you into fields where I had to run over a newly ploughed stretch getting quite mud laden in the process. A gate opposite brings you out of mud and into residential Bayston Hill. I got a bit confused, but this was just early nerves and a lack of trust to follow the direction of the last way mark until told otherwise. I headed up to Lythwood Farm and waiting for the friendly farmer to clear my way of cows through his yard and a thick layer of mud.

He directed me to the fields behind the farm and off I went. The path climbs gently upwards, my feet got even more wet from the long grassy crop overlapping the path but at least the mud was washed off. At the end of the field and scrambling on to the road you are met with a spectacular view of the Wrekin, Caradoc and The Lawley. As I ran along the top of Lyth Hill I also got glimpses of the Stiperstones which were scarily way off in the distance.

I dropped down off the hill and onto a road, past a big chicken farm and onto what was a very muddy track, I could only walk on it. Wilderley Lane Farm is at the end of this stretch and 10 miles in to the run. Here you turn left and start to climb quite steeply up to grassy fields and really begin to feel as though you are in remote countryside. The fields up to the brow of Wilderley Hill are boggy in places and a challenge to run on, getting you hopping as lightly as possible along the path.

The view from the top is wonderful, so much so that I stopped to take a selfie and a few pictures of the view. Pontesford Hill is quite prominent in the foreground.

I then fended off some curious bullocks and waded through a bit of cowpat mud and came out on The Portway. A very straight bit of road, perhaps an old Roman road, and a fast run after all the mud. A right turn signposted 2 ½ miles to Bridges spurred me on into the Golden Valley. This was a glorious part of the run, reassuring me of all the reasons why I was doing it. It was serenely beautiful and glowing in the morning sun.

It's pretty much downhill from here all the way to Bridges, past a lovely campsite at Rattlinghope where some boys were playing in the stream and I passed quite a few walkers. I had not seen any since Lyth Hill.

I met Mum on time at 11.00 am and 15 miles into the run, for a quick but very welcome pit stop before heading off towards the Stiperstones. I changed into my Saucony trainers for the rocky terrain ahead. The ones I took off were literally steaming with mud.

The road upwards is not too bad to run on but it's up and up and up – climbing up to 536 meters at the top. I was shocked at how difficult the main Stiperstones path was. Lots of jagged spikey rocks that don't seem to have been placed to walk on let alone run. This was my slowest mile, taking about 20 minutes.

Again the views were amazing - I could see mountains in the distance (The Arans), Corndon Hill and Bromlow Callow in the foreground. I found out later that there had been snow on the top of the Stiperstones and Corndon that morning.

I was glad to get onto the grassy bank leading to the carpark, finding my way back onto the main path and heading towards Nipstone Rock. I took a wrong turn right, down to the Bog carpark, all because I switched off for a minute and followed the route some walkers were taking up towards me, silly me. I had to climb back up but soon recognised the path from one of our family Christmas walks.

The path starts to descend quite sharply going to the left of The Nipstone and round The Rock. My knees were hurting, and I stopped to have some Lion bar and a huge amount of water.

Down, down the path goes until you pop out onto a road, hop over the road, over a stile and down again over a stream and then straight up steeply on the other side. Linley Hill is a whopper. We had thrown snow balls here on our family walk and it was nice to feel on familiar territory, even if it was very steep. I sorted out a stone in my shoe, had more Lion Bar and gave myself a talking to. I sat on the grass and looked back at the Stiperstones and The Rock, amazing terrain to run on and I felt proud and motivated to push on.



The descent was easier being mainly track and road all the way to Linley where there is an amazing house and landscaped 'garden'. On to More where Mum was waiting for me with refreshments. We laughed about how difficult the Stiperstones were and Mum said 'I did warn you!'

After about 10 minutes and a check of distances (about 8 miles to go) I set off. I encountered some frisky cows in the first field after More, which I had to

circumnavigate. The field spits you out at Lydham where you follow the road to a lovely farm track on the right. I got a bit confused in a field with VERY long grass and, not wanting to retrace my steps, I dropped down to the track I had been on previously, scrambling over some old ruins enroute. I turned left onto the road and was soon back on the main path going up yet another steep hill that brings you into a camp site and onto a path through allotments into Bishops Castle.

I met Mum on the high street for a quick hello and a hot cross bun and then trotted off for the final stretch. Again, the views are lovely, rolling hills to the left and sheep in the fields all around. The path takes you along the right of a pretty stream. This was the only bit where I felt the wind - it must have been funnelling through the narrow valley. I put my jacket back on and sped onto Middle Woodbatch Farm and another huge hill. Colebatch Hill is 400 meters. Amazing views and feeling fabulous I made my way to Mums favourite part of the Shropshire Way. My knees were now hurting quite a lot on each descent, but I told myself to enjoy this part particularly as the end was in sight – being only 1 mile to go.

The path is lined with very old and very big trees some of them having fallen victim to high winds are sprawled across the path, the views to the left of rolling hills and varying shades of green is heart lifting.

Down past the farm and over the road scrambling up the forest track (where the trees have been cut down!) and into a small grassy field. The stile in the corner beckoned and once I had climbed over that I knew I was seconds away from finishing. Sure enough, there was Mum round the next corner. 32.5 miles of running had come to an end. I was euphoric but quite sad too.

