

Running Memories from the Middle of the Pack - by Andy Godfrey

(Written on a very wet day when I had nothing else to do!!)

From being a little lad I have always enjoyed running. Not that I have ever been any good. I have always been what one might call an “enthusiastic also ran” but that did not take anything away from the enjoyment of running and taking part in races.

I was never anywhere near the front in races, usually, taking up a position half-way down the field. But, whenever, I took part in a race I always gave it my all and ran to the best of my ability. That is where I gained a sense of achievement – knowing that I couldn’t have done any better on the day. Nowadays, you sometimes hear the comment “it is the Finish line that counts – not the finish time” and I would agree that running can be enjoyed at any level. But turning up at a race, jogging round and being handed a medal, just to say you have taken part, would mean nothing to me. I would need to know that however slow or fast I had been, I was trying my hardest.



Runners, including myself, are always proud of their PB’s. But people can get fixated with PB’s and if they don’t get one every race they almost go into melt-down. Personally, I think it is better to train for a specific race, have a race plan for the day, don’t get into mini battles with other runners i.e. “run your own race,” but most of all enjoy the race. If you don’t happen to get a PB – there will always be another day. In fact two of my PBs were two of the most disappointing races that I ever did.

Talking of mini battles there used to be a nice Half marathon at Selby which I did a few times. One year I set off feeling good and was going quite nicely. About halfway I had overtaken a female athlete and then she overtook me. Gradually I found myself running faster and faster just to keep up with her. In the end I had to admit defeat and she sailed away into the distance. However, I was left gasping for breath and by the time I got to the finish I was on my knees. This taught me a valuable lesson – to run my own race. I later found out that the lady was actually one of the quickest runners in that area who was treating the race as a training run. (silly boy).

I only ever won two races, and both were absolute flukes! One was at school in a 2 mile race around a housing estate in Hull. (Health and Safety was not an issue then). Shortly after the start somebody tripped and brought down the whole field – except me!! I hurdled over the bodies sprawling around me and put my foot down. Nobody could believe I had won! - including myself!



Another incident from my school days was taking part in the Hull Schools Cross Country Championship. As usual I was half-way down the field. I kept overtaking this guy – then he would overtake me. This went on for a bit when suddenly he turned round and punched me in the face!!! I was so startled I went down like a sack of potatoes but quickly staggered to my feet and in the end beat the kid quite easily. Afterwards a teacher came up to me and asked if I had fallen because of all the blood running from my nose. Not wanting to sprag I answered “yes – probably.”

After school I did virtually no sport apart from a bit of badminton. In football I got knocked off the ball too easily and I was hopeless at cricket. Then in my early 30's the 1980s "Running Boom" was getting under-way and I decided to give it a go.

So my first race as an adult was the 1983 Bridlington 5 Mile Fun Run which was done in conjunction with the first Brid Half. I managed the 5 mile race in 43 minutes and the following year I did four half marathons and a full marathon. The marathon was the 1984 Humber Bridge Marathon which started somewhere near Costello in Hull and, after crossing the bridge, it eventually finished in Grimsby. The organisers had laid on a fleet of double decker buses to bring runners back to Hull and I decided to find a seat upstairs. Big mistake!! By the time we got back to Hull, my legs had completely stiffened, and I couldn't get back downstairs. So I had to bump down on my backside.



In November of 1984 I decided to join Bridlington Road Runners, which had been formed the previous autumn. I was a bit nervous about joining because I thought everyone would be incredibly fast. And there were lots and lots of very fast runners. But there were also runners of my pace as well. Joining Brid RR proved to be one of the best decisions I ever made and over the years I have met

loads of lovely people.

I don't think I have ever met a runner who admitted to being fully fit. Runners always seem to be either just getting over an injury or have a niggle which might turn into an injury. I definitely came into this category being very injury prone. In fact Ray Robinson once called me the "Comeback Kid." Apart from the usual muscle strains and tendonitis I had FIVE major injuries.

While training with a pack of runners I fell and tore my thigh muscle on Kingston Road. It came up in an alarming bulge and I was out of action for several weeks. On another occasion I was running along Quay Road with a training pack when I tripped over uneven paving and head butted the pavement which smashed my glasses into my face. I was left covered in blood but luckily at the time there was still a little hospital off Quay Road and, after being taken there, they put 10 stitches in my cheek. To this day I still have a scar in the form of a Z (the mark of Zorro). Injury 3 was at Carnaby where the heat had made the tarmac footpath bubble in places, and I managed to trip over one of the hardened bubbles resulting in a cracked rib. But probably the most spectacular was in a cross country race at North Dalton. I was within sight of the Finish running along a cobbly farm track in cross country spikes when I clipped one of the cobbles with my spikes and landed with all my weight on my left shoulder. This resulted in another hospital trip with the diagnosis that I had broken my shoulder! The fifth injury was acute plantar fasciitis in both heels. It started after the BRR Anniversary 3 mile in 2005 and despite all sorts of medical and physio attention it refused to clear up. At one point I could barely walk more than 100 metres without severe pain. I had several false starts when I thought it was better but as soon as I resumed training it flared up again. Eventually, I found a course of exercises which helped together with shoe inserts. My wife, and I then decided to take up walking. During these years Maureen and I did Wolds Way, Dales Way, Hadrian's Wall and Cotswolds Walk plus many more hikes. People kept pestering me to try running again and in about 2010 I decided that If I didn't try once more it would be too late. I needed new running shoes so took a trip to York and bought a new pair of shoes from 'Up and Running'. They offered to test my gait analysis and it turned out that I over pronated in both feet. The support shoes that I bought that day worked like

magic and (touch wood) I have never been bothered with plantar since. The only trouble was that with advancing years I had really slowed down. But I was not bothered about this. The main thing was that I was running.

Earlier I mentioned that two of my PBs were a disappointment to me. It was my big ambition to get under 90 minutes for a Half Marathon. In 1989 I had run in a Half Marathon at Grimsby and came close, finishing in 1:31:18. So in 1991 I decided to give this course another go. My training had gone well for a change and by 10 miles I was well on schedule. But as the 11 mile marker came in to view my energy levels started plummeting, and it felt as if I was running through treacle. There was a long straight road with traffic lights at the end and I knew that once I got to the traffic lights the Finish was just around the corner. But the end never seemed to get any closer. Annoyingly my time was 1:30:57 - so close – but not close enough and I never got near that time again.

Brid RR used to have a club time trial at Kilham called the Downhill Mile (sometimes called the Miracle Mile). This was my other disappointing PB. It was a nice straight course with a gradual



descent. My ambition was to get under 5 minutes. One year I got very close – recording 5 mins 3 seconds. The following year I had another go at this target. But despite going flat out I remarkably finished with exactly the same time of 5:03!! Once again, I never came close again.

Over the years I have had several incidents which included animals. While running through a traveller encampment down a farm track off Woldgate we encountered several very vicious looking dogs which, although chained up, were jumping up growling and snarling. One of them caught my hand in its mouth – but because I was running my hand slipped from between its teeth before it could bite. But I still felt the warm, wetness of its mouth around my hand.

At one time farmers used to burn off crop stubble in the autumn. As our pack passed one field near Carnaby which was ablaze from

one end to the other a fox suddenly ran out from the middle of the field and then trotted along the lane in front of us, constantly looking over its shoulder to see if we were keeping up.

Running off-road will inevitably lead to encounters with cattle at some point. The scariest occasion for me was somewhere in the Langdale End/Broxha area. I seem to recall I had begun the training run somewhere near Reasty Bank and to be honest I was a little bit lost even though I was actually carrying a map – (no GPS in those days). Anyway as I came around a bend in this valley, I came face to face with a group of about 20 bullocks. When they saw me, it was obvious that they all thought “we can have a bit of fun here” and they started galloping towards me. I quickly looked around for an escape route – but there was nowhere close enough. However, to my left there was a very steep bank and I gambled that I could get up it quicker than they could. At the top there was some woodland, but it was fenced off and the fence had barbed wire along the top. I looked over my shoulder and saw that the bullocks were gaining on me. There was nothing for it. I threw myself over the fence and to hell with the resulting barbed wire scratches.

On a driving holiday in Arizona, I decided to go out for a run to unwind. It was late afternoon but still extremely hot and as I ran along the pavement, I came across what I believed was a rattle snake. I am not a snake expert – but it was big, coiled, and with its head rearing up, it was hissing, and its tail was

making a rattling sound. In my eyes that made it a rattle snake. Anyway in my panic to get out of its way I darted out into the road – completely forgetting that they drive on the other side in the States, and I was nearly run over. Fortunately on the way back to the hotel, to my relief, the snake had gone.

The most vivid memory I have of animal encounters happened near High Caythorpe, which is in the back of beyond near Grindale. Anyway we were running off-road along a field path. At the top of the brow the path passed through a gate to the next field. As I passed through the gateway, I came face to face with a deer which was running in the opposite direction. We both came to a screeching halt easily within 5 feet of each other. It was October and in the cold air the deer was snorting steam from its nostrils. Likewise, I was also snorting steam from my nostrils. We both stood staring at each other for what seemed like hours but was probably only about 15 seconds. Then the deer heard a noise and turned and ran off, but it was an experience which I have never forgotten.

On another occasion I was out on a training run with Syd Warley. In the distance I could see something running across a field and said to Syd. “Can you see that Syd – it looks like two hares.” Syd stopped and studied the field then replied, “Bloody big hares Andy – they’re Deer!!”

I was also with Syd on a dramatic training run near Boynton. We had headed out along Easton Road then turned towards Strawberry Hill. The sky had been very dark and as we approached the hill forked lightning started crashing down all around us. Lightning was coming down among the trees on both sides of the lane. We knew that it was dangerous to stand under a tree during a lightning storm and both of us started to run faster and faster up the hill to get out into open countryside. Both of us probably setting some sort of PB by the time we reached the top.



I am pretty sure that I have never been close to breaking the speed limit while out running. But on one occasion a gang of us were out training on Marton Road when we noticed a copper standing on the kerb edge watching us approach. As we got closer to him, we saw that he was pointing a handheld speed gun at us! There was no need to worry, however. He just gave us a cheery grin and called out “You’re going have to run faster than that lads. You’re not even registering on this!”

Another time we were on our way back to Brid from Carnaby when a helicopter started hovering just overhead. It was the type that they use for air sea rescue and was so close to the ground that we could clearly see the pilot and crew. They were obviously having a bit of fun with us and followed all the way back to the outskirts of Brid before giving us a wave and heading off.

On a couple of occasions I experienced an electric shock whilst training and, on another occasion, I just had a shock. The first electric shock happened on the field footpath between Boynton and Strawberry Hill. It was the sort of thing that farmers put up to stop livestock getting into a crop. I was merrily jogging along when the guy behind me called out “careful Andy you are getting close to the wire!” I hadn’t even noticed the wire but with that I brushed against it, and it felt as if somebody had kicked me in the knee. The second time I was running across fields near Kilham. The farmer had suspended an electric wire across the field which also went across the path. I decided to duck underneath it but brushed against the wire with my back and the resulting shock winded me. The

third shock was not an electric one. We were running again on the path between Boynton and Strawberry Hill and unknown to us the farmer had set up an automated bird scarer just within the woods that run alongside the field. Just as we passed the hidden bird scarer it went off with an almighty loud explosion. We all jumped about 10 feet into the air with our hearts were pounding!!

Swimming was another sport at which I was hopeless. However, I did once take part in a mini triathlon. It included a 400m swim, a 10mile bike ride and a 4 mile run. I can only do breaststroke. The swim was at the old pool at Filey School, and I had spent weeks practising but, by the morning of the event, I had still not managed to do the race distance without stopping. However, I surprised myself by completing the swim easily, but my confidence had not been boosted when I heard somebody on the poolside saying that I looked as though I was drowning!

I really enjoyed cross country. The muddier the better. Once at Grimsby I ran through a particular quagmire of mud in some woods and thought that my feet felt strange. Looking down I noticed that both of my shoes had come off. There was nothing for it but to kneel and scrabble about to locate the mud filled shoes and, because I couldn't get them back on, I had to complete the race in my bare feet.

On a very windy morning at another cross country at Scunthorpe we set off on a three lap course. As we were on the second lap, I heard a very loud crack and crashing sound. Sure enough a huge tree had come down right across the course but fortunately it did not injure anyone.



For a few years, the Brid RR home course for the East Yorkshire Cross Country League was based at Bridlington Links golf course. The course around the clubhouse had been marked off with brightly coloured race tape. I was marshalling at one of these taped off sections when two golfers went past. Looking shocked one of the golfers said to me "What's going on? Has there been a murder!!!"

Another course that was used by East Yorkshire XC league for a few years was at Bishop Burton Agricultural College. Incredibly it included part of the eventing course used by horses. We had to climb piles of straw bales to get over fences. There was a water jump and also an eventing wall which had rather a dramatic drop down a steep slope at the other side. A helpfully placed ladder was propped up against the wall to assist shorter runners.

The course at Drewton Woods has recently been reintroduced to the EYXC League. Back in the day (probably pre-war) there was a railway line here. Although the last time I was there the only evidence of the line was a cinder track. Anyway, this cinder track used to go through a tunnel (since blocked off) and guess what.....the tunnel formed part of the cross country course. It was horrible. There was NO lighting - it was pitch dark. The only light was a tiny pin prick of light at the end of the tunnel, which gradually got brighter as you finally reached fresh air again. Who thought it was a good idea I don't know, and it certainly would not have passed a Risk Assessment in today's Health & Safety conscious world. Evidently, somebody had a panic attack halfway through the tunnel and this part of the course was then ruled out.

At one time the club used to hold an Open Cross Country meeting based within the grounds of Sewerby Hall. Some years we got permission to extend the course out into Marton Hall grounds or

the adjoining farmer's fields (which eventually became Bridlington Links golf course). Anyway, one year we were setting up the course around the little golf course at Sewerby Hall, roping off some areas and taping off others when we noticed two people watching us. Eventually, they could not contain their curiosity any longer and asked us what we were doing. Quick as a flash John Potter answered, "we are pegging out for Barrett Homes, they're building houses on here soon." The onlooker's mouths dropped open and they quickly scurried off, presumably to spread the news.

There used to be two local events organised by the Boys Brigade that had originally been for walkers but had since also allowed runners to take part. One was the Flamborough Fling which I think was about 28 miles and the other was the Flamborough Frolic which was only 10 miles. One year Barry Clifton persuaded me to have a go at the Fling with him. We had both done London Marathon the month before and I think the idea was that we ran round together as a training run. I had run on all the paths that made up the course before but there was one section between Grindale and Black Cottages which was normally private property and only available on race day. As we were running down this cart track, I felt sure that I could see somebody standing in the distance and I remarked to Barry that I wondered if it was a drinks station. We were very quickly disappointed. The person that I had seen turned out to be a scarecrow!! It was a great course and we had both enjoyed it finishing joint 7th, but we were puzzled when we got to the Finish at the back of the Ship Inn in Sewerby. Where exactly was the finish? Then somebody pointed to a shed. When we went in there was a guy sitting behind a desk. He looked up at a clock on the wall and recorded our Finish Time.



I had completely forgotten about the 10 mile Flamborough Frolic until the other day when somebody reminded me that I had once won it! But that is not as exciting as it sounds. I turned up on the morning of the event to find that at least 99per cent of the people taking part were walkers and as far as I could see there was only about 6 runners (four of whom were youths). Once we started the youths shot off into the distance and I thought that's the last I would see of them. But after about a mile I came

across the youths sprawled out on the grass gasping for breath. So that left just me and this one other guy. We were chatting to each other as we ran when suddenly he said, "It's no good I can't keep this up" and stopped. So I was then leading and at the finish I won by roughly 15 minutes. A 'win is a win' they say but quite honestly, I think that this one can quietly be consigned to the dustbin. In fact my winning margin would have been larger if I hadn't spent several minutes at a drinks station persuading somebody that I only wanted some water and didn't have time to sit at a table while they served me a bowl of soup!!!

The only other times I won anything were the Brid Road Runners Constable Handicap and the Christmas Handicap. But I think both of these were down to kind handicapping. The Constable Handicap had been a bit nerve racking. It was a very misty morning. By the time I reached Danes Dyke I had taken the lead, but I was expecting to be overtaken very soon by the speed merchants. Crossing the golf course I looked over my shoulder – but there was still nobody in view. As I passed the Ship Inn, I had another look but still nobody was in sight, and I thought that if I reached the Coast Guard Station still in the lead I would be really pleased. At the Coast Guard Station I looked again but still could see nobody in the murky visibility. But this time, having got so close to the Finish, I thought that if somebody came past now, I would be really disappointed. At the finish line I looked back and,

the legend that is John Potter was only a few yards behind me. If the race had been a few yards further John would have caught me.

Although I ran a lot of Half Marathons, I always felt that the full marathon distance was a little beyond me. However, I did manage to run 6 marathons but my aim in each of these was just to run all the way without walking. The six were – Humber Bridge, Mersey and London (4 times). In two of the London Marathons I nearly came a cropper. In the 1996 race I had agreed to do it for charity and had raised quite a lot of sponsorship money. Disaster struck at the 6 mile mark. In trying to avoid stepping on a discarded drinks carton I strained my calf muscle. Fortunately, I saw some St Johns Ambulance people nearby and I got a bit of attention. But, even after about 10 minutes of massage it was still very sore. Because of the sponsorship money, I decided to carry on - more or less running the last 20 miles on one leg. I limped home in 4:12:33 and wasn't able to run for weeks afterwards.

I never coped very well with hot weather and in one of the other London marathons that I did I very nearly got heat stroke. The spring of that particular year had been cold but on the weekend of the race London had been very hot on the Saturday and on the Sunday morning it was boiling. I made sure to take on plenty of liquids during the race – but by the time I reached the Embankment I was feeling groggy, and I don't really remember running the last few miles at all – it was just a blur! Remarkably, I still managed to finish in 3 hours 45 mins. I had been hoping to get under 3:30 that year but because of the heat it had eluded me, and I never did manage to break that barrier.



I did the Great North Run a few times. But to be honest it was never one of my favourite races. I didn't think the course was particularly interesting and the start in those days was quite often a nightmare. At that time you could almost start where you wanted to and there were just signs at the start giving an idea of the likely finish time. i.e. "85 mins from here", "90 mins from here" etc. Nobody seemed to take any notice of the signs with the result that it took you ages to get running properly after battling past the 100s of people who were already walking. However, there was one year when I had to suffer a lot of ribbing from other club members. As I was running along the seafront towards the finish, I was among a group of runners that appeared on the TV. But, instead of a fleeting shot the cameras panned back and back keeping this group of runners (and me) on the screen. Evidently, I was on the telly for more than 5 minutes!!

There used to be a Half Marathon at Hawes called the James Herriot Half Marathon (I think it has since become a Trail Race). One year the club put on a trip to Hawes for the race and I went along because I love the Yorkshire Dales. It was quite a warm day and so after the race we didn't take much persuading to visit one of the local pubs. Well we had hardly bought our drinks and sat down when who should walk in? The actual JAMES HERRIOT of "All Creatures Great & Small" fame. Not one of the actors who have played the part in one of the TV shows – it was the actual guy who wrote all of the books. His real name was James 'Alf' Wright, James Herriot was the pen name he used for the books. He seemed a friendly guy and chatted for a while before we had to go back for a bus ride home.

When Parkrun began, I think I was a bit snuffy about it and didn't think it would last very long. How wrong I was – it just goes from strength to strength. It has something for everyone. The fast guys can go hell for leather. People new to running can use it as an introduction to the sport. You can run with your child, with your dog, pushing a buggy or having a chat. Everyone is welcome and it is

marvellously inclusive. Before my body finally decided that enough was enough, I managed 79 parkruns but I have gained nearly as much enjoyment marshalling at Sewerby. One morning that stands out was when this guy came up and we got into conversation. After a while he fished in his pocket and handed me a leaflet saying, "Can I interest you in Jesus." I'm not sure how I kept my cool really. But I handed him his leaflet back and told him that plenty of people had tried to convert me to Christianity before – but all had failed. And in any case, I had come along to marshal a race not for bible study!!!

I don't want to embarrass anyone so I will not name the person involved in the next story. There used to be a 10K race at Scarborough which started at the Corner Café (now the Sands hotel complex) and eventually finished at Pindar School in Eastfield. Some years buses were laid on to bring you back to the Start. However, on this occasion it was up to runners to make their own arrangements. So a 'buddy' suggested that if he parked at the Finish, we could both drive to the Start in my car. Anyway, after the race "Buddy" was waiting for me at the Finish with a worried look on his face. "Andy" he says "I've done something silly. My car keys are in my running bag in your boot." My car of course was at the Start!!! Fortunately, another friend came to the rescue.

While typing that I suddenly recalled that in this race in another year I overtook the lead clock car. To everyone's amusement it had broken down. In the same year I had the dubious honour of having a cup of water handed to me by Jimmy Savile of subsequent infamy.



My last ever race was the 2021 Endure 24 event at Bramham Park. I doubted that anybody would want me in their team because by then I was really slow. So I entered as a Solo runner. I had no ambitions to run a vast distance, but I thought that I might complete 5 laps over the twenty four hours which would total 25 miles. After all I had managed this the previous year in the Virtual Event during Covid. But disaster was to happen. I had felt a twinge in my hip a few days before but on the first lap it was much worse. So I rested for several hours before starting another lap. This time the pain in my hip was really bad and I couldn't run any more that day. The following morning I could barely walk. And this turned out to be my last ever race. I was by then 74 and the hip injury refused to improve even after physiotherapy. In the end I had to admit defeat and hang up my running shoes. One of my friends said to me "Never mind Andy – you've had a good innings."

One last thing. There's a lot of talk these days about races needing traffic management. I was once running in a Half Marathon at Grimsby on what was supposed to be a traffic free course. As I was going round a roundabout, I suddenly became aware of something overtaking me on my right. It was a car which was trying to squeeze through, and it managed to bump against me quite hard as it passed. Fortunately, I managed to stay on my feet, and I continued unscathed. So much for traffic free courses and so much for traffic management.

Anyway, I will stop there. I could add more stories, but I think it is time to close.

Andy's PBs

Marathon

17/04/1994	London Marathon	03:39:55
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Half Marathon

13/10/1991	Grimsby Half Marathon	01:30:57
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10 Mile

05/02/1989	Inglemire 10	01:09:37
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10K

19/05/1991	Withernsea 10K	00:41:48
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Constable Handicap

25/11/1989	Constable Handicap 6.37 mile	00:41:57
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Christmas Handicap (old course)

23/12/1990	Christmas Handicap 6.4 mile	00:43:58
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Three Hill Race

27/06/1991	Three Hills Race 6.13 mile	00:43:20
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Anniversary 3 Mile (old course)

12/02/1989	Anniversary 3 mile	00:20:07
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Down Hill Mile, Kilham

12/08/1989	Down Hill Mile	00:05:03
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01/09/1990	Down Hill Mile	00:05:03
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Track - 5000m

11/06/1992	5,000 m	00:19:22
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