

Thames Ring 250

The epic Thames Ring 250, the longest single looped, single stage Ultra I know of and it was a bit of a beast to say the least.

Running on the flat is generally thought to be easy but when you're contending with canal pathways and posh Henley tourists, it's not always plain sailing.

As some of you are probably aware, my track record has not been very good this year and I went into this race uncertain of what the outcome would be. I had a score to settle, some demons to get rid of but then again that's what I'd said during South Downs 100. Anyhoo, despite all this, Wednesday 28th June saw me at the start line of this monumental race and registration had gone smoothly. I had caught up with Paul Mason and Kate Jayden at the start and then tried to relax as much as I could.

10am came around too quickly and suddenly this was it, Lindley had given the race brief, and now we were off. The Thames Ring 250 (2017) was underway.

Each checkpoint was 26 ish miles apart and our first leg was on the river Thames, heading south towards London. We passed through Henley and the Regatta and suddenly our trail running world was turned upside down. There were well-dressed, upper class men and women everywhere. Everyone was in their best suit or dress and you could smell the money coming off the place.

Jags and porches and Aston Martins lined the roads and open grass spaces, expensive private tents and gazebos had been hired and some had their own private bar and viewing platform. All this we had to run past and through and it was the most surreal half hour that I've experienced, here we are in our running kit all smelly and then we have Britain's finest all suited and booted ready for a damn good celebration.

It wasn't only a few tents and stalls either, this thing stretched out for miles and miles. Eventually however, we did leave behind the hustle and bustle of the Regatta and it was back to being focussed on the task at hand. Soon enough CP 1 came into view and it was time for a quick snack and drinks top up.

The next section of the route took us past Dorney Lake and then through the amazing Windsor and Eton as we followed the course of the Thames, Windsor Castle stood in all its glory and welcomed us into the town. We stopped at one of the local pubs for refreshments and a drinks top up before heading back on to the course. Before long we had reached the area of Chertsey and CP 2 and it was just starting to get dark now.

I had a concerned message from Louise saying that she thought Paul Mason was still in the checkpoint but as I looked around I couldn't see him so I went over to the chairs and sat down for a moment whilst I refuelled and topped up water bottles.

Someone had ordered a Dominoes pizza (Bob Wild) and we were allowed to take a slice, it was so delicious and just what we needed to get us through to the next leg of the journey.

As we made to leave the checkpoint, there was a commotion on the floor nearby and I realised some paramedics were there trying to get one of the runners into the back of an ambulance. With a shock of horror, I realised it was Paul who was being looked after and concern filled me as he didn't seem himself. I tried to find out what was going on but no one would say what was happening.

Paul was bundled into the back of the ambulance and myself and two other runners reluctantly left the CP to continue on our way. I felt sorry for Paul as I knew he had trained hard for this event and hoped that nothing serious had happened to him, I checked in with Louise to give her an update and to keep an eye out for any info regarding Paul, she was worried too now.

Continuing along the Thames, it wasn't long before we were in the familiar territory of Rik Vercoe and the beautiful setting of Walton on Thames and the Famous Hampton Court.

CP 2 Chertsey – CP3 Yiewsley (80 miles in) Start of Grand Union canal

After Walton, it was pretty much a straight forward section through to Richmond, I was running with Rik, John and Steve McAllister at this point. Despite feeling a bit tired, we were all in good spirits. We caught up to Ellen Cottom just before joining the Grand Union Canal but we pressed on ahead as Ellen was taking some time to relax and have a walking break (She soon caught up to us later on).

Once we had found the start of the Grand Union Canal, we took a moment to rest and sit down. It was the middle of the night, but office blocks towered all around us and the lights were bright and dazzling. The enormity of our journey was starting to hit home now. This was a big distance, a big distance indeed.

After 20 minutes or so, it was back up and time to press on to the next checkpoint. We started off with a light walk and every so often threw in a few 10 minute jogs. This section was fairly uneventful and we soldiered on through the night until eventually, at 4:56 am, we reached CP 3.

Here I sat down for a while, had some hot food and topped up my drinks bottles. I then curled up on the chair and tried to get some shut eye as I was getting rather tired at this point.

Ellen passed through the CP quickly and said she would be finding a comfy spot of the trail later on to lie down.

After a brief respite, it was time to dig in and get back out there.

CP3 to CP4 (105 miles in - Berkhamstead) Beer at CP4 and Quesdillia

I set off on this section on my own, and soon passed Ellen who was just chilling out on a bench. The Grand Union from this point was mainly straight forward, there was one section where the canal split and I had to double check I was on the correct section but other than that, it was a fairly uneventful section.

Many hours passed and at last I reached CP 4 and 105 miles into the course. The CP was outside a pub and with great satisfaction I ordered a pint of Guinness and

a Quesadilla which were both very well received. I also had a bacon sandwich from the CP and many drinks of Coke.

My feet were really starting to hurt at this point so I removed my shoes and allowed my feet to breathe. I also put fresh plasters on my toes even though they were starting to blister a bit now.

I remained at the CP for about 40 mins and then it was time to head back out again. Milton Keynes would be the next rest stop and it looked like I could possibly be using that as my first sleep stop.

CP4 to CP5 (130 miles in Milton Keynes) Nap time at Milton Keynes

After leaving checkpoint 4, I felt a bit more upbeat although my blisters were throbbing a bit now. The weather was still fine and the canal surface was great to run / walk on.

This section of the route seemed to drag on for ages but eventually I came across Ian who was also running the race. Ian was from Newcastle and had previously only ran a 60 mile ultra so he had really gone outside his comfort zone taking on this race. (He went on to complete the race as well which was absolutely fantastic to hear).

At the time I saw Ian, I had phoned Louise for a good cry because I was just a bit broken at this point. Poor Ian witnessed having a blubbing moment but once I was off the phone, to his credit he was cool about it and just asked how I was doing and we just had a good chat about the race. He was a really nice guy and had a really relaxed approach regarding the race. Despite some pain in his feet he seemed nice and chilled out about it.

After chatting, I pushed on ahead for a while and then needed to rest again. I sat down and Ian caught back up to me. We then walked together for a while which was good because I think I just needed the company to be honest.

I decided to do a bit more jogging so on I went for another couple of miles and then I was welcomed by a pub at the side of the canal and I decided a pit stop would do me good. I ordered caramel short cake, a pack of crisps and a pint of coke. It was so so good to top up the energy levels and just rest my feet.

I saw Ian go by as I was eating and he was still looking strong and setting a consistent pace. After topping up my water bottles, I headed back out and started playing the bridge counting game hoping I would soon get to the Milton Keynes Checkpoint.

At around 9pm Thursday evening, I reached CP 5 Milton Keynes (130 miles in) and was greeted by Enigma running's very own Foxy (Dave Bailey). Foxy sorted us out with a bacon sarnie and other snacks and drinks. I had decided to get some sleep at this checkpoint so after eating and drinking, we worked out what how long I could have and when they would wake me up. I was going to have 3 hours kip so the guys would wake me at midnight.

Getting into the tent and sleeping back was awkward but eventually I got in and laid down. I couldn't really get comfortable but lying down was nice and it felt great just to stop for a while and switch off.

Not too long after I was joined in the tent by John, who had been running with me Rik and Steve earlier today. He was knackered as well and soon it was all quiet in the tent.

Midnight came around too quickly and Foxy was soon waking us up to get us out of the tent. I wearily gathered my things and got dressed again.

CP 5 to CP 6 (Milton Keynes to Nether Hayford 156 miles in) Blister repair time, Re-united with the Masonator

I sat at the checkpoint for a while, drinking coffee and allowing myself to wake up again. Before too long, both me and John were back on the trail and were walking along chatting and trying to shrug off the short sleep we'd had.

We kept a steady walk going but soon we were passed by the legend that is Bob Wild, aka Gandalf, who had kept the same strong pace throughout the whole race (and still maintained that pace right to the finish line) he chatted with us for a bit and then pressed on further.

The night came and went and then we were into Friday. At 146 miles I got to series of locks leading up to Stoke Bruerne and once I reached the top lock I sat down for a bit and called Louise. (It was around 8am if I remember rightly).

After chatting to Louise I headed towards Blisworth Tunnel and got ready to take on the big ascent to the top. At this point, John had joined me again and together we headed to the top of the hill which took some climbing.

At the top we picked up a minor road which turned out to be quite busy. The road seemed to stretch on for miles but eventually we reached a car park where we re-joined the trail and took a steep descent back down on to the tow path. Here I asked if John had any food to spare as I was pretty famished at this point and had used up my supply of food I'd had in my ruck sack. Luckily he had some spare energy bars and fruit cake which I happily wolfed down.

We saw Ellen and Javed pass us as we were resting but it wasn't long before we got back on it again and plugged on towards the checkpoint.

After some light jogging / walking / jogging I had gotten ahead of John a little bit and managed to catch back up to Ellen. We had a good chat about our journey so far and we got to checkpoint 6 together.

CP 6 arrived without incident but by this point my blisters were causing me agony and my feet felt on fire. I needed to get them sorted at this checkpoint and I'd heard that Lindley's partner Maxine was a dab hand at sorting out blisters. Paul Mason had come down to the checkpoint and was thankfully looking happy and recovered after his ordeal on Wednesday night.

I was grateful to see Paul and we had a good catch up. He had brought me a lot of supplies which I happily accepted and consumed. Thankfully Maxine was at the

checkpoint and once she had attended to other peoples feet, she came over to sort my feet out. It was painful but also felt great to have the pressure released from the blisters.

I had a good chat with Louise here and she was impressed with how well I was doing and she told me she was really proud of me. I was excited because I knew I would be seeing her at the next checkpoint. Paul then had a chat with Louise whilst I was still getting my feet attended to and I was having a lot of food and drink.

I met one of the legends of the Thames Ring here too, a guy called Javed was resting here at this checkpoint. This guy is the only person to have doubled the Thames Ring (500 miles!!!). I was impressed chatting to him and had huge respect for the guy. Javed went to have a lye down and I went back to eating more food and drinking coffee.

Paul was great support and kept me focussed by chatting to me and giving me tips for later in the race. I had some paracetamol too which would help me later with the pain in my feet and legs. Paul also explained how we would go up and over a tunnel and also turn off the Grand Union Canal and follow the Oxford Canal.

CP6 to CP 7 (Nether Hayford to Fenny Compton 176 miles in) Meet up with Louise

Me and Ellen left the CP together and we were feeling pretty great and refreshed. My feet felt so much better and I could hold conversation again which was great.

This section of canal was fairly runnable and we managed to make good progress, jogging and walking. Paul had said he would be out on the course to point us in the right direction where we needed to change canals and which tricky sections to look out for to ensure we got on to and followed the Oxford Canal.

We came across another tunnel and had to take a steep ascent where the trail left the canal. Higher and higher we climbed until eventually the trail levelled out and then steeply descended again. We had a nice jog down at this point and eventually came across some steps which took us back down and alongside the canal again.

I stopped to have what seemed like my 100th pee since starting the race and then jogged to catch back up to Ellen again. Once I caught up to her, I saw that Paul was there too, beaming at us both and saying how well we were doing.

Ellen had procured 2 cans of coke from a local shop and we both happily sipped these whilst taking time out to chat with Paul. He informed us where we needed to change canals and then said he'd be waiting for us tomorrow at the finish line.

Paul departed and, with lovely sugary coke topping up our sugar levels, we resumed our journey to seek out the Oxford Canal.

We negotiated the first tricky network of bridges to get us off the Grand Union and on to the Oxford Canal. After proceeding on the Oxford canal for about a mile with a little doubt in our guts, we found the first bridge and cross checked the number with the race instructions and thankfully we were on track.

At the next junction where the canal split again, we took some time to lie down on the grass and relax. We were comfy here. Ellen took time to call her partner and I called Wayne Drinkwater as he had been sending messages of support throughout the event. It was great to chat with Wayne and he was impressed at how far I'd gotten and was confident that I would now get to the finish.

We had a good rest and then got back up to take on the next part of the route and start another round of our friendly count the bridges game. We had a lot of bridges to count before Checkpoint 7 but we dug in and ticked each one off as we went plodding by.

We soon caught up to Caron (2015 Female winner of the TR250), she was struggling with injuries and we stayed with her for a while to make sure she was ok. She was hurting but she said that we should go on ahead as she was just focussing on getting to the checkpoint.

We began jogging again and the bridge game resumed. I was getting rather fed up of counting bridges to say the least but I knew Louise would be at this checkpoint and I couldn't wait to see her.

Finally after hours of plodding and jogging, we found the two bridges that were located close together on the map that indicated the checkpoint and then it was there, the checkpoint at 176 ish miles was finally there and Louise was standing there on the trail. She ran towards me and I was filled with happiness, I was so glad to finally see her. She gave me a huge hug and I hugged her back and give her big kisses, I was just so glad to see her.

Me and Ellen were led to chairs in the checkpoint and there we were handed lots of food, drink and attention. I felt such a sense of achievement at getting this far into the race but I knew there was a lot of work to be done, I didn't know then how difficult it was going to get.

CP 7 to CP 8 (Fenny Compton to Lower Heyford 205 miles in) The longest night ever, damn the rain damn the lilly pads and damn the Oxford Canal)

Myself and Ellen had a great refuelling session at the checkpoint, Louise fed and watered us both and I tended to my feet again which were still sore but better than they had been. I even got a massage off Louise on my legs because my quads were throbbing and my calves were tight as well.

After a 10/ 15 minute massage, I felt a bit better and started to get ready to head out. Suddenly the sky got a lot darker and the heavens opened. It was like the sky was trying to get rid of a weeks worth of water in one go. We sheltered under one of the gazebos and our faces just fell at the change in conditions. I was suddenly reminded of the UGB 200 last year and I really couldn't do with facing this next night in these conditions.

Thankfully after half an hour or so, the rain eased off a bit, enough that we could at least brave it. We both donned full waterproof gear, I gave Lou a quick kiss and cuddle and then we headed back on to the trail to tackle the next 25 miles.

This section of the Oxford canal was the easily the worst section of the whole race. Whilst it was still light and we were still jogging and it was all still ok but slowly and surely the darkness came, the Lilly pads crawled en mass to the side of the canal, encroaching on to the trail, tormenting us and still the rain dropped on our weary heads.

Ellen was telling me that we were close to where she fell into the canal 2 years ago, she was getting a bit nervous about it and the wet, slippery conditions were doing nothing to ease those nerves. There wasn't a lot of room on the tow path because the Lilly pads made you have to hug the hedge on our left side, we couldn't see where the edge of the canal actually was and every now and then there would be sections of the trail missing so you went to put your foot down and you would drop about half a foot down because there was a pot hole.

In the dark this was a frightening and dangerous experience and therefore our pace became much slower and the course became all the more challenging for it.

Conversation stopped due to the fact that we were knackered, fed up, cold and wet and just concentrating on not falling into the canal.

Our feet were getting wet from all the plants and foliage that had been drenched by the rain. I was getting really fed up of pushing past all the damn lilly pads, they just made walking even more frustrating.

After what seemed like hours we slipped into a bit of a time loop and the trail looked like this: 1, 2 3 locks, follow the trail round to the left. Lilly pads and broken trail and 1, 2, 3 locks, follow the trail round to the left, lilly pads. This seemed to repeat several times over before the trail straightened out again.

We came across a busy road bridge at around 12.45 am and I was fed up with it all. I wanted to shelter until it got light again so we could actually see where we were putting our feet.

Ellen agreed to shelter too and we sat down on the hard ground underneath this busy road. When we sat down we could feel the cold wind and it was awful, I got some foil blankets out of my bag and tried to cover us both while we rested but to be honest the blankets didn't really help.

After half an hour, 45 minutes, we were both really cold and not really able to get to sleep so we reluctantly decided to go back out into the wilds and crack on. It was grim but eventually we started moving again.

We passed through a well lit town and this was a nice respite and felt quite nice to pass by civilisation albeit somewhat briefly.

I'm not sure at what mileage or how much time had elapsed since we passed through the town but Rik and Steve McAllister caught up to us whilst we were

just chilling by one of the canal crossing points. We were all a bit wiped to be honest.

Together, the four of us dug in and pressed on, the Lilly pads unrelenting and still the rain came down. We pressed on through the night and somehow managed to make progress. What happened later that morning will be something I will never forget.

Have you ever felt raw emotion, that pure, wild, uncontrolled, complete loss of self where the body resorts to only the most basic instincts? At 4am on Saturday morning, I felt this for the first time in my life and it both scared and awed me. Even now I cant think how it was even possible that, 197 miles into the race, I sprinted, I sprinted for my life and I sprinted some more.

The Oxford canal had grated on me all night and when it got to the point where we had laid down on a bridge after what had seemed like a 30 mile hike in the rain, I had had enough. We were at bridge 193 and had to get to 206 where the checkpoint was. This was still about 5 miles away and I could take it no more. I let out a shout of frustration and I just started running. Hatred and anger welled up inside me and I felt my body filled with heat, all I could focus on was seeing Louise at the checkpoint and all I knew was that I needed to sprint.

I passed Ellen and I passed Rik and soon I had left them far behind as I steam rolled ahead. I couldn't understand how it was happening or why but somehow I was actually running and running fast. Now that the daylight allowed me to see, I wasted no time picking my way across the canal trails and I was covering the distance effortlessly. I began breathing deep and heavily to control my pace but still I powered on. The river wound left and right and the bridge numbers ticked away.

Soon I had passed bridge 205 and only half an hour had passed by. The next thing I knew was seeing the river stretch out straight ahead of me and Louise stood in the distance waiting for me.

I have never felt such strong and focused emotion like this before but all my body was focused on was getting to Louise. I ran hard to cover those last few meters and then she was there, she was right there. I barrelled into Louise and caught her in my arms. I wrapped them around her, hid my face into her shoulder and cried my heart out, cried harder than I had in a long while. I had finally made it to checkpoint 8, 205 miles in.

CP 8 to CP 9 (Abingdon and the rude runner who awoke me from my slumber)

I spent a good 45 mins to an hour at this checkpoint and Louise ensured that I was well fed and watered. I just couldn't believe it was finally daylight again and that this was, at last, the final day (all being well of course).

Last nights ordeal already seemed like a world away and somehow not real.

As I sat there in an almost dream like state, it became very apparent that there was only 1 official checkpoint left and then it would be the final stint the finish.

Wow, how had this happened. I looked at Louise and just kept smiling at her, she was here to share this journey and she was being my absolute rock when I needed her the most. I knew I could get this done now, the finish was in sight.

I changed T-Shirts again and prepared to leave the checkpoint, I had one last bit of food and drink and then set off on my journey to CP 9. As I left the CP I noticed Ellen was having a proper deep sleep and two other runners had just left.

I began to jog and said hello and all the best to the runners as I passed them and then tried to get some of my previous pace back.

The weather was warm now and the trail a bit more runnable than previous. I settled into a steady rhythm and was slowly ticking off the mileage.

After about an hour I came across a bit of a marina where there were toilet facilities and drinking water so I took some time out here to replenish my stocks of water and to answer nature's call.

After having a quick bite to eat as well, I set off again at a bit of a light jog and continued along the canal.

Another half hour / 45 mins passed by and the weather was becoming increasingly hotter and more like a proper summer's day. I came across a particularly inviting grassy bank by one of the bridges and felt like this would be a great place to lie down and get 20 mins shut eye. I figured no one was behind me for several miles so it would be ideal to rest a bit.

I lay down and closed my eyes. I was so relaxed at this point it was so comfortable. Suddenly, after what felt like only 5 mins, I was awoken by the sound of another runner. "Come on stop sunbathing, you've got some running to do"

I opened my eyes, shocked to see another runner, and he explained that he was hoping to bump into someone so he could run with them. I got up and gathered up my things. I agreed to carry on together and it felt much better to be actually running with someone at this stage of the race. John introduced himself and talked about all that had happened with his race so far, then I explained my journey so far and then we got on to discussing usual running stuff such as previous races etc.

We made our way into Oxford and before too long it was time to leave the Oxford Canal (Halle-Fracking Lullah) I was so glad to leave this behind and it was exciting to know that we would now be joining back up with the river Thames.

As we were making our way over to the Thames, we had to negotiate several low level bridges. The first required people to duck very low, I had just started to move forward beneath the bridge when I heard a dull thud and a shout. Poor John hadn't ducked and had whacked his head on one of the steel girders, ouch ouch. We took a moment to rest as John needed a moment to recover, it was lucky the bridge didn't do any serious damage to his head.

Once he had stopped being dazed and confused, we cautiously pushed on and back out into the open and on to the start of the Thames section.

This section seemed to go on and on but we didn't mind at first because the weather was great and there were lots of people about which was nice for us. It made a good change to the loneliness of the Oxford Canal.

I thought I knew this section of the route after doing the Thames Path 100 and when I read on the instructions that the CP was near the leisure centre in Abingdon, I thought "Ah yeah that's that big building we run past on the Thames' Turns out I was completely wrong (I was thinking of a building on the last 5 miles of the course, damn tiredness).

The trail seemed to be never ending and when we entered a wooded area I was starting to feel a bit lost as we were nowhere near the place I thought we should be.

We started a little jog through the woods and my attention was focussed on the location of the CP and where the hell we were and suddenly I was brought quickly out of my dream like state by a shout. As I turned I saw John stumble and fall to the ground.

Poor John had caught his foot on a root (his blistered foot) and fell to the ground. That must have really hurt. I helped John to his feet and we decided to walk for a bit now. John's foot was in agony, having almost torn the blister off now, walking and running was a painful affair.

In doubt about the CP location and phoned Louise and chatted to both her and Paul, they said they would send a few people out on the trail to look for us and, just when we thought we were going mad and going circles in the forest, we heard someone call us and saw some marshals walking towards from a nearby pathway.

We greeted the marshals warmly and thanked them for their help. We crossed a weir in the river and finally Abingdon was in sight. I was chatting with one of the marshals and John got a bit of a spurt on and jogged to the CP. I was pretty knackered now and just followed at walking speed and I arrived at the CP shortly behind John, glad to be there at last and having a strange realisation that we had now done 232 miles.

Louise was there and Paul and Caroline too. I gave Louise another big hug and she fussed over me and helped get me food and drink and even gave me another massage that greatly helped my legs. John didn't hold back on the food, he needed energy, it was an all you can eat buffet and John was going to take full advantage haha. I just wanted to sit down, have some hot food and air my feet for a while.

The whole magnitude of what we'd achieved so far was really starting to hit home now, I just wanted to hug Louise and hold on to her. I couldn't believe we had come this far and that we were now so close to finishing.

CP 9 to the Finish (the final 18 miles and it just got hotter)

This was it, the final push, the race was all but complete now, we had done the hard graft now and we had about 20 hours to get the next 18 miles done. Still, it wasn't going to be easy but we knew we could walk it in now.

Me and John left the Checkpoint, full, fat and happy and almost awake. The sun was beating down on us and it was such a glorious day. We set off walking just to allow our legs to warm up again and to let the food settle.

We were chatting merrily away and the sheer distance we had covered was starting to hit us, it felt surreal and we just couldn't believe how far we'd come.

The fact that 232 miles lay behind us was incredible and crazy and made us laugh on several occasions at the madness of it all.

Here and there we would have a little jog and it felt better to have a jog than it did walking. The heat was telling though, I love running in the sun, but in our fatigued states it was a little too hot.

Our spirits were high however and we were chatting to various people and families we saw along the Thames. One family were having a picnic and offered us some fruit and drinks on account of the hot weather, they were stunned when we told them how far we'd come.

Continuing on further, we followed a trail through several fields that ran alongside the river and this section was basically a horse shoe shape and you could see in the distance where the river turned back on itself which we tried not to focus on too much.

Eventually we came to a bridge / lock and crossed over to follow the river as it bared off to the left. We were really feeling the heat at this point so we stopped to take on liquids. I was getting a bit concerned at this point as I was down to 1 bottle left and still it was getting hotter.

The trail took us on to a road that would eventually pass by a pub. This was indicated on the map and I suggested to John that we head in there to get re-fills and to get a cold drink too.

This turned out to be a great decision, it was nice to shelter from the heat but also amazing to sit down and have a cold glass of coke. We topped up all our bottles and chatted to the bar man about the crazy challenge we were doing. He was impressed by the distance and said that he knew others who had done big distances along the Thames.

After a good rest, we said our goodbyes and headed back out feeling much better and confident for a daylight finish.

As the route took us across another weir to the opposite side of the river, I realised that we were at last in single figures (9 miles to go) and hi-fived John congratulating each on this incredible milestone. I became a little overwhelmed and felt I just wanted to share this moment with Louise. I promptly rang her up

and said "Baby, I just wanted to share something with you. For the first time in this race, we are now into single figures!!"

I could hear the emotion in Louise's voice as she said how proud she was of me and well done to us both. She was really excited that we were so close and I couldn't wait to get back to the finish to see her.

Feeling elated, we both pressed on with a spring in our step (or maybe I was trying to be a bit springy and pulled John along a bit). Hopefully I wasn't too annoying but I knew we were almost there now and I could still jog and it felt good to jog.

We kept up a good steady pace, doing a walk, jog, walk strategy that worked out really well.

We soon came to a junction on the trail where we had to make a decision, the instructions did say straight on, but there was also the option to turn right and join the road a bit earlier on. After a short debate, we decided to follow the route straight on and join up with the main road half way along.

Once we had reached the road I felt confident I knew the way back now, having done this route on the TP100 and Autumn 100. This confidence lasted all of 5 minutes when, as we were running downhill, we passed a sign for a hotel and it made me doubt myself as to whether or not we should have turned left down there.

I phoned Louise and unfortunately I was a bit grumpy and rude due to my fatigued state (Sorry again baby, I was a grumpy Kay) We didn't want to have to go back up the hill again. Louise put Paul Mason on the phone and he told us we have to turn down Ferry Lane.

Thankfully we hadn't passed it and we continued a bit further down the road and then there it was. We got back on track and I was definitely confident now as this part by the river again was all familiar to me. Just shows what 3 days of fatigue can do to the mind though. Doubting myself on a straight, easy section of the route. (Sorry for this feu pax John).

We had about 3 miles left now, this was it just a park run to do. It was just starting to get a little dark as the light was fading but I could smell the finish line. I knew Louise and Paul were there, I knew that this would mean I had completed a monumental challenge, knew that getting these last few miles done, I would be one in a select few to complete such a massive race.

As we entered a forested area, we had to be careful of large tree roots that stuck out of the floor, thankfully Paul had warned us about these. John took extra care as he definitely didn't want to scrape his already blistered and sore feet again.

Suddenly we heard a shout and, looking across the river, we could see people waving at us. Goring was in sight, the finish was in sight but we still had a little bit of trail to negotiate first. My voice caught and I felt the tears well up, Louise was so close now.

Passing through the gate we followed the trail towards the church and then we saw Caroline, Paul's partner, this could only mean one thing, we were at the village.

I said to John, "This is it buddy, lets jog this last bit in. We've done it, we've bloody done it" We just laughed and made our way on to the high street.

We were running it in, actually running it in, people were running towards us and we were running too. Suddenly Louise was in my arms and I hugged and kissed her.

We ran across the first bridge and then across the second bridge (No more bridges thank god for that) and there it was, the village hall loomed into sight and Lindley and Maxine were there and then we didn't have to run anymore, we didn't have to do anything anymore. It was over, it was finally over and I just fell into Louise's arms for the biggest hug ever.

Somehow, after 83 hours and 41 minutes, we had completed 250 miles and what a bloody tough but epic adventure it had been. I gave John a proper man hug and we both just laughed, with the biggest medals ever around our necks, we congratulated one another and just stood there a little overwhelmed by it all. I just couldn't stop saying 250 miles haha. We've done it, the Thames ring 250, what a beast it was and what a beast it will remain. Fantastic event.

After all the photos, we finally went into the village hall and sat down for food and drink. It was so so good to just stop, just to stop and know that we wouldn't have to go back out and do another 25 miles. That was it, we had done the incredible and finished joint 10th place in quite possibly the toughest race I've done to date.

The Thames Ring was a race that I needed to complete and it took me to places I had never experienced before mentally and it was a tough beast to conquer although I'm not sure how much conquering we actually did, maybe more survival. This was an epic adventure and a great event but one that tested me both physically and mentally.

I would recommend this race but don't take it lightly and make sure you like playing the counting bridges game because you get really good at it by the end of the race. Post TR250, I have not stopped eating and I have not stopped sleeping. This race has drained me and I just want to anything and everything.

Sleep wants to envelope me at any opportunity but this is all because of what a big distance and big challenge for the body to endure the race is.

My next 200 adventure will be the Ultra Great Britain again in August. I have a couple of 100 milers in between and then its big adventure time again.