

Round Norfolk Relay

Mixed Team Report



The Support Team (from left):

Madeleine William: Bike and van escort, action photographer

Lizz McKiernan: Captain, Deputy timekeeper

Debbie Fisher: 1st Lieutenant, Chief Timekeeper

Natalie Andrews: 1st Stage Runner

Rob Pope: Bike and Van Escort

Darren Murfitt: Bike and Van Escort

Off Camera:

Jon Price: Bike and van escort

Laura Todd: Stage 7 Runner, last minute Party Van convert

Kristian Skinner: Car mover, Dogsboddy

After months of work, hours of toil, broken bones, last minute substitutions, injuries and long WhatsApp discussions on what exactly ISO 20471 meant, the support team, timekeepers and first runner Natalie Andrews arrived at Lynnsport, our setting off point. After rising at 3:30am there had already been drama as our Captain misread Lynnsport as Littleport, assuming her husband had been driving in circles for the past hour. Registration completed, Natalie, Rob, Darren, John, Maddie, Lizz & Debbie had the team photo taken and the air was full of anticipation for the 6am start.

Stage 1

Kings Lynn to Hunstanton

Natalie Andrews

Off went the horn, and Nat sat off at a firm pace on one of the more challenging stages; 16.7 miles through Sandringham, sand and dune Nat toiled as the timekeeping car raced on to Hunstanton for the first changeover. Butterflies made way for excitement as the crew poised for the first changeover. Tom Copping, new to the RNR, waited nervously to collect the baton. But we were past the predicted arrival.

Minutes ticked by.

5.

10.

Then a dreaded call from the support van 'we haven't seen Nat, is she with you?'. Panicked phone calls. Should we send the bike out to find her? And then Nat was spotted, in glorious pink, on the wrong side of the lighthouse. Two roads had diverged in a wood, and Nat had taken the one less travelled by. But guided by the hand of God, and the screams of 'we're over here' by all of the assembled RNR teams, she safely arrived to hand off the baton and the crisis was averted. Nat had done a sterling effort through tough terrain.



Stage 2

Hunstanton to Burnham-Overy-Staithe

Tom Copping

Tom set off into the slowly clearing mist for a tough stage of gravel and sand to Burnham-Overy-Staithe. This beautiful spot is short of parking, has one toilet (which was the obvious place to present Nat with her medal), and is famously partially submerged at high tide. The escort van, AKA 'the party bus' were troubled not by this fact of celestial mechanics. Boldly parking on the beach adjacent to moored boats, all gathered at the second changeover. Kayleigh prepared for her first RNR run by blasting AC/DC for the journey North and arrived buzzing with nervous energy. Time and tide wait for no man, so as 11:30 arrived and the tide came in, the party bus began to feel the touch of lapping waves, and Rob 'Canute' Pope, unable to hold back the tide or to verify the seaworthiness of a VW Kombi on google, had to relent and move the van. Tom, pounding the sand and pavements of North Norfolk, and only mistakenly following another runner into a stranger's garden once, arrived 8 minutes earlier than expected and handed on the baton to Kayleigh, before collapsing in a pale, sweaty heap. The timekeeping crew, having 2 doctors on board, leapt to his aid, handing him a wooden medal and telling him 'Well done, sorry mate, we've got to get to Wells'. The NHS would have been proud.



Stage 3

Burnham-Overy-Staithe to Wells-next-the-Sea

Kayleigh Owen

Burnham-Overy-Staithe is a tricky stage with long, narrow stony paths, some beach and some woodland, a regular Highway to Hell. Mingling with confused beachgoers, other teams and an unexpected Bethan, Sam and baby George, the tale was recounted of 5 years ago when a pre-running Lizz was visiting the beach on RNR day and wondering what mad human being would partake in a 198 mile overnight relay race. Marisa, new to the RNR, was a hero at the 11th hour when last minute changes meant drawing on our dedicated reservists. As she stood poised at the changeover, she looked confident in everything, except perhaps the strange man she'd handed her keys to who had explained his dislike for automatics and that he'd never driven an electric car before.

Kayleigh, having taken the record for most number of recce runs (3), performed the perfect handicap run, and arrived precisely on time, with her 00:58:05 predicted time resulting in a 00:58:05 recorded time - Girl's Got Rhythm. Off Marisa ran. After a brief check confirming Debbie's faultless timekeeping the Party bus, timekeepers and Marisa's car set off.



Stage 4

Wells-next-the-Sea to Cley-next-the-Sea

Marisa Jolley

The route from Wells-next-the-Sea to Cley-next-the-Sea is predominantly next-the-Sea, with winding muddy trails and compacted gravel, passing through Blakeney and then continuing on the beautiful Pedder's Way with glorious views of the marshes and the stony beach. The sun was bright by now and runners were arriving thick and fast onto the cruel pebble beach, sweaty and tired with a short gravelly hillock to greet them before changeover, as if to make sure they were seriously questioning their life choices. Stephen Kyle, spreadsheet extraordinaire, had worked out his splits to the second and using his technological wizardry, wrote them on Post-Its stuck to his vest. Marisa could be seen from far away, trying as politely as possible to get dawdling tourists out of her way on the narrow path. Crunching up the rocky hillock she handed the baton to

Stephen, before resting wearily, a job well done. Her car miraculously survived the tight roads to be given back to her in one piece.



Stage 5

Cley-next-the-Sea to Cromer

Stephen Kyle

Stephen was new to RNR and therefore hadn't realised before his recce that he had been given a brutal segment of loose pebble beach and hills, including the notorious Beeston bump. There was a curious shape in his vest which may have been a Lizz voodoo doll. Maddie as cyclist set off alongside him before rushing back to the party bus to travel on, for the reliable van crew to stop off at every meet up point to cheer Stephen on, before arriving at the Stage 6 changeover to join the timekeepers, Cheungs and Laura to complain about having to pay for parking. There was a sense of camaraderie and we chatted to the now familiar faces of other timekeeping and van crews. Slowly over the crest of the hill hove into view the beaming, bearded face of Stephen after running a blinder. He handed over to Fred Cheung for stage 6. The suffering of Stage 1-4 runners had not been in vain, as the timing team eventually realised that runners may appreciate sugar and fluid as well as blocks of wood. So, Stephen was the first to be greeted at the finish by full fat coke and sweets.



Stage 6

Cromer to Mundesley

Fred Cheung

We could not have known before Fred set off, nor do we truly know now, what exactly he had done to upset the gods of the weather. But in their rage, they let forth a torrent of biblical rain. Fred, with Maddie on the bike, ran at a lightning pace through the deluge. Throngs of RNRists were huddled under umbrellas or taking refuge (and buying cake) in the village hall; Mundesley was buzzing with excitement. Rob had conscientiously readied himself to relieve Maddie of cycling duties, though at this point we were considering whether a canoe may be more useful. Laura, first time RNR runner, stood defiantly in the swirling downpour waiting for the baton. Abruptly, the rain stopped and the air fell still and quiet apart from the slow tinkle of water down drainpipes and van drivers swearing trying to negotiate the tiny narrow car park. At which point Fred sprinted around the corner to hand over. A brief negotiation and Maddie retained cycling duties as Laura set off. Fred, sopping wet, was then mocked by the sight of the sun breaking through the clouds to make a glorious rainbow off the coast.



Stage 7

Mundesley to Lessingham

Laura Todd

The weather gods' ire at Freddie continued to affect the Stage 7 Queen as they unleashed a spectacular shower of thunderbolts and lightning (very, very frightening) crashing into the surrounding land and sea. Laura pounded on o'er field and vale and the B1159 with Maddie cycling alongside. The narrow lanes were a bit hairy for runners, but all made it through, with the only issue which upset all being team 59's bike getting a puncture and then the runner being unable to hand over the baton until it could be fixed and join them. Laura ran hard the whole distance and on arrival at Lessingham, 2 minutes ahead of schedule, looked sufficiently exhausted that an onlooker took pity and brought a folding chair out for her to rest on for the medal presentation.



Stage 8

Lessingham to Horsey

Camilla Cheung

Off Set Camilla Cheung, new to the RNR, with haste, through a winding road stage through Ingham corner, Sea Palling and Waxham. At the Stage 9 handover point, the bucolic Horsey Windpump and Mere, all talk was of excitement, car swaps, chips and fish. Maddie had to make an early exit, but Laura had been tempted to the dark side and decided, spur of the moment, to spend the rest of the night on the party bus. However, team unity was about to be tested as Rob and Darren invited us for Heaven's sake to sit upon the ground and hear sad stories of the lack of fish and chips. Through bitter tears they recounted how previous promises of fish and chips have never materialised. As the rest of the team wept at this sorrowful tale, all were surprised to see Camilla hare around the corner 5 minutes early.



Stage 9

Horsey to Belton

Pete Wood

Pete Wood, last minute hero was poised and, grabbing the baton, rushed off into the failing light. The gloaming fully upon us, we paused to wonder what had happened to the world when a local fish and chip shop would only take orders on the 'Winterton Fish and Chips App'. As the timekeeping car set off for Belton, a tiny industrial estate on the edge of Great Yarmouth, and the party van fired up into amber-light

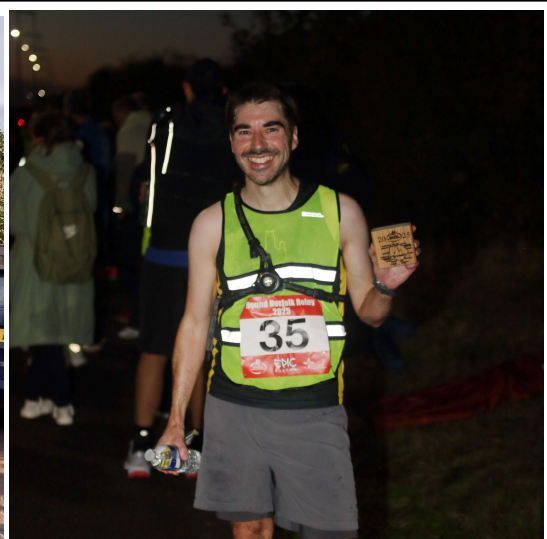


flashing glory, Maddie and Kristian headed off for Winterton, checking with Pete that he didn't mind us stinking up his car. Arriving 5 minutes before the order was ready, they were treated to the scowls of angry locals as they realised our mammoth order of 7 large Haddock, 1 giant battered sausage, 18 sachets of tomato sauce and 9 large chips had delayed their own. A swift exit was made before the quiet rural idyll was ruined by tutting and disapprobatory glances. By the time of arrival at Belton, it was full darkness,



lights of passing escort vans and the blindingly bright light above the cake stand to illuminate us. Kristian was about to lose any brownie points earned for picking up the fish and chips as it became clear that in his haste to escape a stern chiding, he had completely failed to pick up any cutlery. Thankfully, as the sun had fallen below the horizon, so had any sense of dignity for the weary crew as each found their own unique way of eating an enormous battered haddock without cutlery.

Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown, and Lizz had dreaded this changeover which from the course description sounded like reciting Shakespeare whilst solving quadratic equations. Happily, the experienced crew of the party van explained that it mainly entailed packing the bike away then driving around a roundabout and the changeover was so smooth that Maddie was able to throw 5lbs of haddock and chips through the window of the party van. Pete set a great pace despite having the Great North Run lingering in his legs from only 6 days prior, and arrived to his reward of tepid, slightly soggy fish and chips, 2 snickers and a plastic cup of cold Coke. And his block of wood.



Stage 10

Belton to Ditchingham

Neil Krajewski

Neil Krajewski took over from Belton. An RNR veteran, he had volunteered to do anything whatsoever that could be helpful. With last minute changes, this comprised running into the black of night chased by a van of people eating fish with increasingly weary left legs. Though an uncomplaining group, the party van crew began to lament that they had a manual van rather than the automatic, and after 17 hours of straddling first and second gear, with only cycling duties for relief, the crew's quads had worked harder than the runners'. But this happy breed of men (and women), this little world, this precious stone set in the silver sea, sailed on into the night; a sea of orange flashing lights punctuated only by the occasional confused local thinking they were stuck in roadworks.

The stage 11 changeover point at Ditchingham is at the Bungay Black Dog running club headquarters, also home to Bungay Town FC. Coordinated by a very kindly but not particularly well organised gentleman, the car parking increasingly resembled the fever dreams of MC Escher. The increasingly exhausted timekeeping team took the opportunity of a long stint to nap. Emily Salt Neé Sweatt was full of nervous anticipation and greeted by an increasingly chilly Kristian. Emily adores stage 11 to the point at which this was her third go. The venue has an ample supply of what might generously be called outhouses or may more accurately be described as spider houses with cisterns. Despite the arachnid infestation, such was Emily's commitment to keeping up her pace, so as not to be overburdened with a single ounce of urine, and much to the dismay of the timekeepers, she attended them 3 times, including 2 minutes before Neil was due. Right on cue, Neil arrived with the baton and Emily set out hard. Neil had done all that could be asked of him and more than earned his wooden block and bottle of mineral water. Darren, hopping off the bus for a pee and some deserved R'n'R, joined the forward team.



Stage 11

Ditchingham to Scole

Emily Salt

Emily had set out joyous despite an increasingly tired team. The party van continued their wearying work of following and protecting their runner as the timekeeping team and Emily's car tramped on to the next venue at Scole. An unassuming and unlit field in the arse end of nowhere, this was the perfect venue for a nap or stargazing. The milky way, visible in the utter dark of the country sky, would be an incredible and irresistible sight were it not for the incessant threat of timing and escort cars ploughing into those who found time to stand and stare. Meanwhile in the party van, the long hours had taken their toll. Rob's impressive quads were giving out, and he would need to swap driving duties at the next stop. Laura, with 10 miles' hard running and 6 party bus hours in her legs, had tried to climb into the back seats over the front seat and pulled her hamstring. Jon, showing her how to do it properly, jammed himself between the roof and head rest until he was stuck fast, injuring both his back and pride as passing Norfolks were treated to the sight of a Full Moon until he could wriggle himself free. Protected by flimsy cordon tape Toby was poised to take the baton, whilst his girlfriend Alice prepared set off to meet him at the next stop. Forewarned, Darren was ready to stick back on the 'Runner, beware' sign, which currently hung limply from the rear bumper, and jump into the party van cab. Thanks to the skill of the hosting team, a busy and complicated changeover was negotiated without mishap. The party van pit stop would rival that of any F1 team and Toby was held up only a moment



Stage 12

Scole to Thetford

Toby Kay

Toby had volunteered for the long leg between Scole and Thetford. The Timekeeping car was forced to slow to enjoy the beauty of Toby's running form, which was variously described as beautiful, efficient, elegant and faultless, before proceeding to Thetford Tesco. Not all Heros wear capes, but some come bearing coats, and so Jason Clarke appeared to hand an old coat, hot coffee and cans of Lucozade to a weary shivering Kristian in an act of kindness which will ring through the ages. Cake, coffee and a good time was had by all. The Open team, hot at our heels, had also admired Toby's gait but were jealously informed that he was a mixed team runner and was not for nicking.



Stage 13

Thetford to Feltwell

Jason Clarke

Toby nailed stage 12 and handed over the baton to the stalwart Jason Clarke. A long-time member of the club, he had never run the RNR but was able to maintain target pace over bumpy narrow roads to Stage 14. Set in the relaxing environ of RAF Feltwell, we were met with a beautiful vista of razor wire, tank traps and machine gun towers. The tranquillity was broken only by the chaos of arriving and departing teams trying to get through the same single-track road to the car parking. Laura had taken a break from the bus and was on hand to support Ryan who was feeling a bit nervous and nauseous. Nerves were frayed, timings were tight and the fatigue was showing. This may explain why the usually calm team Captain, sensing the need for a pep talk in our darkest hour, gave a rousing speech, quoted verbatim below.

*“I’m sorry he’s nervous, but if he’s going to f**king vomit then he can f**king vomit in that f**king bush [at the start line], not in the f**king toilet [200 yards away]”*

Sinews stiffened, blood summoned, Ryan was ready at the start line as Jason came in having maintained an even pace and kept us ahead of time. A quick change of party bus personnel meant he had to stop after 50 yards but was soon racing off into the distance.



Stage 14

Feltwell to Wissington

Ryan Parker

‘Gentlemen in England now a-bed shall think themselves accurs’d they were not here’ we thought, as timekeepers and Callum, first time RNRer, arrived at the Stage 15 venue- a large industrial G’s farm distribution site in the middle of nowhere. There were nerves and fussing as we worried about whether Callum’s car, blocking a gate to the depot, would be moved in time for the gates being opened. A steady stream of runners and escort cars were arriving now, as the teams with a later departure caught up. In the dark somewhere, Ryan was running his characteristic metronomic splits with the party van following close behind. The mixed team’s performance so far was so good that Callum, arriving an hour before the predicted start time, had mere minutes to ready himself for the next leg through the coming dawn. Ryan pounded into view but so dark was the night that it was only when he was 40 feet away we were sure. Medal presented, Ryan set off home for some well earned rest. The party van continued to plod its relentless course into the night.



Stage 15

Wissington to Downham Market

Callum Corley

The route to the Stage 16 turnaround at Downham market appeared quite short. Google thought not. Bleary-eyed and foggy-brained Kristian did stop to check that google maps did indeed want him to drive the timekeeping car against the thick tide of runners and escort vans. Only when they arrived with barely 5 minutes to spare did he realise that it had wanted him to avoid the very heavy traffic of 60 vans, also using google maps, crawling along at 8 miles per hour. The car park being closed added to the panic and the car was eventually abandoned in a bush to allow the timekeeping team to greet Ali for her leg. The Open team timekeepers had now caught up, but their runner was still minutes behind Callum. Ali’s beaming smile and relentless enthusiasm geed on the flagging team. Rob readied himself on the bike and as Callum came into the handover ahead of schedule, a meticulously turned out Ali raced off into the glimmering dawn. Callum had run an excellent race, taking a chunk out of the predicted time.



Stage 16

Downham Market to Stowbridge

Ali Driver

Legend told of a 24 hour McDonalds on the edge of Downham Market, and WhatsApp was abuzz with coffee orders for a weary crew, whose long night was nearly done. After covering the footwell of Ali's immaculate Land Rover with a sea of napkins, coffee carefully placed upon it, a nervy, slow drive to Stowbridge brought much needed caffeine to the timekeepers and escort crew. Not a drop was spilled. Honest. Breath could be seen in the crisp morning air and marshals, crew and runners stood shivering in dry robes.

Alison, a first time RNR runner, had bravely stepped in after Janet had broken her arm. She lined up nervously, with Baz the Open team runner for the final leg warming up alongside. Ali ran into view illuminated by the bright golden early morning sunshine, still beaming with somehow unblemished make up, and handed over the baton for the final leg.



Stage 17

Stowbridge to King's Lynn

Alison Beardon

It had been a mere 26 hours ago that the team had set off from Lynnsport, but arriving back it felt like a lifetime ago. Debbie, Lizz, Laura, Darren, Jon, Rob, Laura, Ali, Kristian and Callum gathered at the start/finish line with the Open team crew, chatting with renewed energy as the sky brightened with the rising sun, the day warmed and the buzz of the many teams infected all. Baz arrived first for the open team having set a blistering pace, to the claps and cheers of all the assembled Ely Runners. Only 2 minutes (+6 hours) behind, at the end of 17 stages, 198 miles, and in a time of 26 hours, 42 minutes and 23 seconds, the mixed team finished as Alison sprinted across the line to great applause. There was not a dry eye in the house as Alison was reunited with the team and her daughter, Isla. Debbie submitted the final time, having proven herself a champion chief timekeeper by being relentlessly organised, sensible and focussed despite frequently dodgy phone signal and concentration-sapping tiredness.

The teams tidied up and wandered into the leisure centre where between mouthfuls of a full English breakfast the teams chattered about the night's events. Full-stomached and caffeine-d up, the teams gathered on the 400m track for the presentations, which were being made early. The Open Team came in a strong second, with multiple stage awards and 1 record. The mixed team, a little surprised, were also awarded the second place in the mixed category. There was great celebration, but confusion then reigned as it was announced that there had been a mistake. After 20 minutes or so, it was clarified that the organisers had forgotten that people need to finish races before the result is known. The Mixed team were equally proud of their eventual 3rd place out of 6 competing teams. As the 1st and 3rd mixed teams had by now wandered off, on the advice of RNR veteran and club guru Stephen Howard, we took the 2nd place trophy hostage waiting for the 3rd place trophy to be returned.

The team couldn't have happened without Lizz, Debbie, Rob, Jon, Darren and Kristian who had been present and working throughout the 26:42:23 run, and awake for 31 hours, with huge contributions from Maddie and Laura. Bone weary, the team members slowly drifted off to their homes to recover in whatever way they could.

It was concluded that Lizz's pre-running impression of the RNR 5 years earlier had indeed been correct- this was a completely mad thing to do.

