



Race Report

SALTWOOD CROSS COUNTRY RUN

Date: 26th December 2008
Location: Saltwood

What else would you do on Boxing Day?

By: Robin Slowgrove

Christmas time is for families, or it is for me, remembering your own childhood and having an excuse to link up with people you should have seen more of in the year. Well this year I was going to try and see my eldest sister and my elder brother. When I was thinking about how to make this happen, my brother-in-law mentioned that the village where they lived would be busy with a fun run on Boxing Day and to either come early or well after lunch to miss the snarl up.

I was curious about the run and so "googled" Saltwood and cross country run. Up came <http://www.boxingdayrun.org.uk/> and I started reading. I realised I knew one of the organisers, having played cricket with him when I was at school and thought I would give it a go. What else do you do on a boxing day? (I don't do sale shopping)

I pre-registered and my number came through about three weeks before the start, We planned to do a short drive from London down to Saltwood and arrive in good time for me to get something to eat before the race and have time to digest it, have an easy warm up and get to the start feeling relaxed and ready to go.

Run Day - well things were not quite as planned, we were in Bognor Regis and we had over slept. I had a quick bowl of porridge at 08.00 and tried to stay calm as my wife took forever to get ready. (I know better than to say anything during this phase of getting packed for being away) We finally had the car packed and left just on 09.00.

It takes about two hours on a good day to get to Saltwood if you hoof it and don't get held up, the village would be very busy from 11.00, things were tight but we might be OK. The first 80% of the journey was to plan when all of a sudden, whilst on the M20 at Ashford, we suddenly saw a load of hazard flashers light up in front of us. We braked hard and then we stopped, we had come upon a crash involving 4 cars, 3 were very together on the hard shoulder/nearside lane and the 4th was stuffed into the central reservation crash barrier.

Being a bloke and only thinking of one thing (the run... honestly) I said "Brilliant, just my luck, 8 miles away and this happens" Annie replied "I do hope no one is hurt" How is it my wife can put things in perspective so quickly? I stopped thinking about me and had a look to see if we could help.

As it happened, 3 people who were there before we arrived took control and started directing traffic, we were waved through a small gap and as we had not seen the accident happen we carried on towards Saltwood. We arrived at 11.10 and the village was packed with people, cars and traffic barriers, we needed to get through to my sister's house, - -this was going to be fun.

Using big smiles, my race number and keeping the car ever so gently moving forward we managed to get to the race start where we persuaded an official to let us through a barrier to Rectory Lane, where my sister lives. We had arrived at 11.30, I was stiff, tense and had not given the run any thought at all.

First things first, yes the toilet, (why does it always take so long when you are in a hurry?) then it was getting changed and a quick run down to the start.



What a great day, sunny, trillions of people, lots of laughter, dogs getting excited and lots of little ones on daddys shoulders. Being packed together was protection from the wind but because so many people were there I had no clue as to where to be and how fast would everyone run.

The PA blurted out that the start would be late and we should all move down Grange road away from the start line. As is always the case in crowds, nothing really happened and all I noticed was we all got closer to each other. More PA announcements, more shuffling and suddenly bowing to the inevitable we were off. Well the first couple of people at the front got away, back at my place in the pack, nothing just a cheer. Before long we started to shuffle in the right direction and after about 60 seconds and treading on 2 children and one dog I was into a very slow jog.

About 300 yards later we were stopped again, we all had to get through a hole in a hedge big enough to take just 2 at a time. We Brits know how to queue. Once through the hedge we were into a school playing field, short green grass and loads of space. It was then I started to see just how many people were running. After another 500 yards I was back in a queue. A "kissing" gate and bridge being blocks to progress. Some of the more savvy runners ran down the bank and through the stream and out the other side, but not having local knowledge I took my turn on the bridge.

After the bridge the next impediment to progress were the 40 steps to climb, no overtaking on these, but I was told compared to other years they were easy. After the steps it was a gentle climb to the highest part of the course before turning at the church and running down an incline to another "kissing" gate. We were now more strung out so no real queue, just time to take stock of how I felt. I was bloody starving, but apart from that I felt good.

Across the road at Slaybrook and another climb through some woods, a narrow footpath with quite a few people walking. It was hard to overtake without pushing so although I was not passed I did not gain any places either. When I came out of the woods it was downhill all the way to the finish line, we were back on tarmac and my idea was to push for home for the last 900 yards.

For whatever reason when I went to up my pace nothing happened, I just could not get to go faster and I cruised in a happy 228th out of 900 or so starters. All in all the boxing day run at Saltwood was very friendly and I talked to loads of people at each queue. A real fun run. More info visit <http://www.boxingdayrun.org.uk/>

Was it fun? Yes. Would I do it again? Yes. Might I go for something closer? Very definitely. Will I eat more before running? Yes.