

Pilgrims Ultra 5-6 May 2023

Whilst much of the nation was engrossed in the coronation of King Charles, two hardy Deestridders and their support crew were engaged in an incredible ultra across North Wales with a very special twist.

Christine Cammillare and Nige Parr were two of only six athletes who took on 144 miles of the inaugural North Wales Pilgrims Way Ultra Marathon, organized by Pen Llyn Ultras, with many more opting for the 60-miler and regular marathon. Starting at Basingwerk Abbey in Greenfield the self-navigated course follows the North Wales Pilgrims Way westward out to Aberdaron, taking in beautiful ancient churches as it meanders through woodland, over rivers, past waterfalls, deep into valleys and through mountains, along the coast, through villages and into the wilderness.

On the Friday our brave pilgrims set off at 6am, with an 18 hour deadline to cover the 66 miles to the overnight destination of Llanfairfechan. The pair were supported along the way by their respective partners Paul Lewtey and Andrea Wadcock-Parr, along with fellow club member Linda Turley and Christine's father. The support crew took on some skilful driving on remote country lanes to ensure they popped up wherever required with supplies and encouragement. Said Linda "These guys were coming in strong at each stop on Friday. It was great to be part of the support crew- but I'm so glad I wasn't running it!" Paul however did, accompanying the runners for the final 20 miles of the route in to Llan which the pilgrims reached at 11pm, an hour before the midnight cutoff.

Though the simple bunkhouse of Platt's Farm was welcome they had barely 7 hours to get what little rest they could before it was back out again. Christine, who two weeks previous had run a 3.36 PB at the London Marathon, was suffering badly with blistered feet and was unable to fuel properly as she could not stomach a proper meal. Three of the field had been eliminated on day one but she heroically managed 28 miles of the second day before taking the wise decision to call time on her journey at Llanberis, being the only woman to have taken on the full ultra and having covered an incredible 94 miles. Rightly, she has no regrets and is proud of what she has achieved. "I love to push myself to see what I can do... I'd hate to always think "I wish I would have tried that". This weekend was amazing- I loved it, even the sore feet as it reminds me that I tried. (What Nige did) is truly inspiring and to have been at his side for some of it was like being part of something epic."

Indeed epic Nige was as he took superhuman efforts to the next level continuing onward for a total of over 24 hours, just a few miles behind the leader and eventual winner Darren Bentley, moving solo through the night to finish the 78 mile leg at St Hywyn's Church in Aberdaron at 6.30am on Sunday morning. A veteran of Pen Llyn events Nige described this one as "the most "beautifully brutal" of them all but he was full of praise for the event, the route, his fellow runners and supporters and simply said "My mantra is, if my mind believes, my body will achieve." He then revealed that he had had a fall very close to the finish line but miraculously came away from the whole adventure with little more than (very) sore feet and laughed "there's still some miles in this old goat yet!"

Meanwhile at this weekend's Liverpool Spring 5k Sue Bonney ran a fine PB of 32.30 and over at Alderley Edge Steph Salusbury ran a fantastic 55.56 PB in the 10K with husband Mike finishing in 54.27.