

**...and that was how we found ourselves on the start line, with 100 miles/84 laps of a track ahead of us...**

It started with me meeting a very nice lady on the LDWA's Punchbowl Marathon one damp, muddy February. After commenting on my walking speed, we got chatting about walking in general then race walking. Until then I did not know much (well, nothing really) about race walking and to me a Centurion was a Roman dressed in a skirt & sandals! I soon realised that I was talking to someone who knew quite a bit about walking and later in the day found out that the lady I had been talking to was Ann Sayer – they then told me to 'Google' Ann – which I did, only to find that this was someone who knew a LOT about walking and was a champion and a pioneer of the sport. Ann had not mentioned a word about all this to me, saying that she had done a fair amount of walking in her time. Ann may be a very modest lady but oh boy, she sure is persistent! Having told me at a later date about the Centurions, she was not going to let me rest until I had my number! I was sent details about events but the thought of repetitive laps was just too much for me. But Ann continued and then the 2011 event was to be held at Lingfield Park (45 minutes from where I live) and so my excuses were inadequate and before long, I was signing up for 84 laps of Lingfield Park...

How on earth does one train for something like that? Firstly, another of Ann's 'targets' for the Centurion was a very good walker who I had met on the Sevenoaks Circular event previously when I had managed to find my way back on track having been temporarily 'navigationally embarrassed'. Wendy sure did walk fast, very fast actually. We did a few events together and were well paced as a team so it was Wendy and I taking on the Centurion 100 as a team. When I walk, my arms are pumping and my hair flying wildly from side to side but Wendy just seems to 'glide' along. It does not look a fast pace...until you stop to do up a lace or take a photo...and she is gone...out of sight!

There was no set training plan as we did not have a clue what we were doing for this one so we did short laps, long laps then practiced eating whilst maintaining pace (that was the fun part!). I e-mailed Ann for advice and got the response 'just go at 4.2 mph and you will be fine'. I started trying to do calculations of speed required but being 'mathematically challenged' I only managed to figure out that we needed to walk fast and limit the number of breaks to 10 minutes every 2 hours. I think the strategy was that we really were 'winging it' and the idea was not to set out to do 100 miles but to see how far we could go in 24 hours. That took the pressure off but the pressure was still on in that we had made a pact that this was a once-and-once-only event so we would have to live with whatever we achieved on the day.

With the British summer doing what it should do for once, we had a weekend of fine weather ahead of us. On arriving at Lingfield Park, there were crews setting up gazebos, rest areas and for the Dutch, their own time keeping clock. I popped open my black and white cow print festival tent and pegged it to the ground - 1 minute & job done! The vast food supplies we had brought went in there and that was us ready – it was going to be a 24-hour eating fest by the look of this set up.

Then we found ourselves on the start line with the enormous prospect of 100 miles to go. How had I gotten myself into this I asked? Ann...that was it, I was blaming Ann! I could think of many (more enjoyable) ways to spend a weekend and this was not on that list!

Wendy and I settled in to a comfortable pace and the Garmin said 4.9mph so that is what we were going to hold at as we went round...and round...and round – then round again. The plan was that we were going to do a route recce for the afternoon, go for a walk overnight then have a stroll on Sunday morning. Everyone seemed to be eating 'technically' in order to maintain energy but I was soon fed up of the same sandwiches, biscuits, dried fruit, nuts and cereal bars that was when a large 14-inch Milano pizza appeared (kindness of Fabrice who, along with Marie and Graham Doke, were looking after us – and doing a great job of keeping us going), it was like a gift from heaven. This pizza was a tomato base with a topping of fresh basil leaves, shavings of Parmesan and olives. Having been handed a slice of pizza, we maintained 4.9mph whilst eating it, without dropping a single olive! This was repeated over the next few laps until we were happily stuffed with pizza and many other competitors were looking on in envy.

The only break we had taken so far was one 'ladies room' stop before dark - having asked Marie to check both portaloos were available so we could go at the same time! By now we had become known as 'WendyandTara' with

no one really knowing who was who but encouraging us on anyway and one of the Dutch teams having written 'Go WendyTara' on the track in chalk. Night fell and it got chilly, then cold but we just did not want to break rhythm and stop to put some trousers on so we continued through the night, still dressed in shorts, to be greeted by a misty and VERY cold daybreak. From the depths of the mist, there emerged an ethereal figure – not moving, just standing there still. As a long discussion ensued regarding the difference between daybreak and dawn, the identity of the figure was revealed to us...it was a windsock!

As the sun burnt off the morning chill, we were on our way again and back up to pace – having slowed during the early hours. Eventually the number of laps was reduced to teens, then finally to single figures before the 'this is your last lap' bell rang and we were off the line at Mach 1 to do our final lap. We were about to complete 100 miles and we were under the 24-hour time limit – WE HAD DONE IT!

Some 'famous Centurions' were there to see us completing, amongst them Jill Green and Ann Sayer. Ann who had been responsible for talking us in to this was there to see us finish in 21:33h. We were there because of the persistence of Ann... ..and that was how we had found ourselves on the start line, with 100 miles/84 laps of a track behind us.

Thank you to our great support team, who kept us fed and moving and thank you to Ann for having faith in us.

Tara