

9. The social side of TRC

A small, friendly and social running club

If you search online for Tring Running Club, we announce ourselves as ‘friendly and social’. ’Twas ever thus.

In the club’s earliest days, its founder, Ken Laidler, emphasised the importance of everyone finishing club runs at about the same time so that ‘we can still enjoy your company’. And at the end of the club’s first year, he observed that ‘the camaraderie, friendship and general participation has been fantastic’.

One of the club’s most cherished personalities, John Boielle, was renowned for welcoming new members to the club. In 1992, he waxed lyrical about the benefits of chatting to each other:

Most of us talk to others on club runs. But not enough. Talk increases aerobic capacity. The more you talk, the more the increase. Sentences should be not too long. No longer than a gasp. There should only be short gaps or gasps. Between sentences. Or phrases. Keep it short. And loud. There does not have to be a point. Jogging is the same: it’s not where you go that counts, it’s how much ground you cover.

Here’s a look at some facets of the club’s social life.

The pre-run briefing

On a normal Wednesday evening, club members gather in the bar at the cricket club. At 7.25pm there are usually a handful. By 7.30pm, there is a throng. The chair, or other committee member, rings the bell above the bar and calls the room to order. There follows a celebration of recent race results, a plea to sign up to volunteer for the Fun Run/Ridgeway and the essential ‘Is there anyone new here tonight?’ If the newbie is lucky, they will have been spotted and sorted into a pace group. Without more ado, the cry goes up, ‘Let’s go running!’

The post-run chat

In keeping with Ken Laidler’s wish, all the pace groups arrive back at the club house by about 9pm. Since 1998, we have been meeting at Tring Park Cricket Club and the bar overlooking the cricket pitch is the place to be after a run if you want to cool off/wind down/catch up with your mates/gossip.

With a pint of Side Pocket and a bag of nuts, the world can be put to rights. You will hear about the controversies over the years – Dog Gate, the smoking ban, the showers – and the plans for the next ridiculous mountain running challenge by a club member. Most of all, you will get to know your fellow club members just a little bit more and continue the long TRC tradition of being ‘friendly and social’.

The TRC Presentation evening

TRC and the London Marathon both started in 1981 and club members have run in London every year. It is fitting, therefore, that on the Sunday evening of the Marathon, TRC holds its annual awards ceremony. Championship trophies are given out and the Marathon runners, adorned with their London T-shirts and medals, are celebrated.

Of course, having risen at 5am to get the coach to Greenwich, queued for an hour for the portaloos, waited nervously for another hour in the holding area, run 26.2 miles and staggered back to the coach somewhere in Victoria for the return to Tring, a night out the cricket club may not have been top of the mind. A pint of Side Pocket soon restores sanity.

The TRC Breakfast Runs

Nigel Kippax writes:

It's where it all started for me. I remember it well, my first ever run with TRC. September 2004.

I'd heard that TRC were organising a social and friendly 'Breakfast Run' at 8am on Saturday starting from Tring Garden Centre. Just turn up. It was Brian Nicholson who greeted me. For those who don't know Brian, he was the person who always noticed a newbie and made them feel welcome. Such an important role at TRC.

The other thing you should know about Brian – these were the days before Garmin GPS – was that every run was 'between 5 and 6 miles'. So when, after well over an hour of reasonably paced running I asked 'how far are we running today Brian?' the answer was 'Oh, between 5 and 6 miles!'

The TRC breakfast run was always inclusive, welcoming and with the added benefit of a great breakfast. Over the following years we visited many local cafes and pubs from Berko to Wilstone, from Tring to Cholesbury, summer, winter and specials at Xmas.

We were also welcomed to the homes of generous club members who opened up their kitchens to cope with the masses. The Mulcahys at Edlesborough, our house at Buckland and the Hopcrofts at Ivinghoe. As you see, we really did travel the world! What they all had in common was a friendly run and a warm welcome. A small picture of what TRC is all about.

So what happened? Times change. TRC Breakfast Runs were normally organised for 8am on a Saturday morning so their popularity waned with the growing success of the Tring parkrun.

So what does the future hold? Who knows. Maybe it's time to rediscover the Big Breakfast Run!

The Christmas Hash

The club takes a break from Wednesday night running for a week at Christmas. But you can't keep TRC runners down that long. A daytime hash is organised. In recent years, Peter Hamson and Tony Hill have acted as hares with help from many others. The general idea is that the hares set a trail using deposits of flour and the chasing group sets off about an hour later to try and catch the hares. The challenge is that there will be false trails.

Wherever there is a junction or choice of routes, the chasing group sends out scouts. Only one route will be the correct one. If found, the scouts shout out 'On-On', the chasing group follows and the other scouts catch up. The format is perfect for TRC socialising. Faster runners search out the false and correct routes while everyone else can stand around for a chat before setting off again.

TRC invitation evenings

Every May, we invite other local running clubs to join us for a Wednesday night run. We ask people to join a pace group of their choice. Without fail, our visitors comment on the beauty of the countryside on our doorstep, the variety of our runs, the quality of the club house venue and the hospitality we provide. Invitation evening is often the busiest Wednesday run of the year with over 100 runners joining in.

The Devon Pub Run

For a period, this was a fixture in the club calendar. It seems to be the definition of social running but finally fell victim to health and safety. It was good on the health side but a bit risky on the safety! Anyway, here is Richard White's account of the Midsummer Dream Footpath Challenge:

There is a long-standing club tradition of enlivening the AGM by introducing a whacky, possibly controversial, motion into the proceedings. With that in mind, Mike Gaunt stood up at the AGM on Wednesday 13 January 1999 and began:

'I've been reading about this race in Devon where you run 18 miles and drink six pints of beer. I think we should go...'

His pitch was so successful that the club agreed there and then to hire a coach for the occasion.

About 20 runners made that first trip to Devon, a significant proportion of the 200 race entry limit. The course, 18-ish miles of beautiful Devon countryside including a 6-mile section of the coastal path, was familiar to some of the more serious athletes as it featured in the 'Grizzly', one of the more serious events organised by the Axe Valley Running Club.

Nevertheless, the first year was something of a journey into the unknown. While all of us were familiar with trail running, and most were familiar with drinking large quantities of beer, none had tried the two simultaneously – how could that possibly work?

The delightfully bonkers nature of the event was confirmed at the start where we were marshalled into two groups of 100, lined up facing one another like a giant rugby scrum. On the gun the groups ran through each other and set off around the course in opposite directions. The logic was to relieve pressure on the first pubs which arrived after about a mile and where the pints were pre-poured and waiting for us.

Turns out that a cool pint is most refreshing on a hot summer day after a brisk run and we all soon settled into the rhythm of the event. In fact, after pint number three I was running alongside Mike Gaunt who turned to me and said, I don't think the beer is having any effect,' as he fell into a ditch to emerge swathed in giggles.

Half distance was marked by a cream tea stop and a strong desire to lie in the sun for a while, strengthened by the view ahead of a long steep climb towards the roller-coaster coastal path.

Willpower prevailed and led us to the biggest challenge of the event, namely leaving pub number four where a rather raucous beer festival, complete with Morris dancers was in full swing. We reached the finish at The Hook and Parrot, Seaton, via a doubtless memorable pub number five to be rewarded with pint number six – hurrah!

For some reason a dip in the sea seemed appropriate before heading for the coach back to Tring. Although not a race, Richard Collison and Dave Fryer were believed (by themselves at least) to be the first drinkers to finish.

The event became an annual fixture until its demise in 2009 when the organisers were unable to obtain a race permit and, crucially, the accompanying insurance (indicating that that was probably the first year the athletics authorities had studied the permit application for the event).

While on the theme, TRC occasionally did its own version of the pub run in the 1990s and 2000s. Here's the itinerary in case anyone wants to follow the route: start outside the Kings Arms in Tring then the White Lion, St Leonards; the Asheridge Arms, Asheridge; the Bull, Bellingdon; the Rose and Crown, Hawridge; the Golden Eagle, Ashley Green; and finishing at the Crown, Berkhamsted.

And finally, for many years Richard White organised a TRC 'Night at Tring Brewery' complete with fish and chips and lashings of Side Pocket.

The Tring Boundary Trail

In 2015, Tring celebrated the 700th anniversary of becoming a charter town. TRC's contribution to the festivities was the inception of the Tring Boundary Trail. John Manning devised a circular route following as closely as possible the parish boundary of Tring and the rural villages. Full details of the route are on the club's website.

In July, the trail was inaugurated by several club members covering the entire 28 miles and others joining in for shorter legs. Continuing the club's tradition of sociability, the Anglers Retreat at Marsworth had to be visited en route and there the assembled throng enjoyed a pint of TRC's very own Boundary Tr'Ale, a beer specially created for the occasion by Tring Brewery.

TRC Easter Trips

Tony Ruberry wrote in 2010:

There is a misconception that the famous Tring Running Club Easter trips to the Lake District are in some way an athletic venture. Well – I think it's about time that I dispelled that myth. These weekends away are really about excellent company, fine food and drink, and a lovely place to stay surrounded by wondrous countryside – with a bit of running and walking thrown in for good measure.

The first Easter trip was back in 1996 and we decided then to make it an away tour every two years. I enjoyed the first couple of these so much that I started organising

them and with each successive trip I've worried that it wouldn't live up to the last. I've only once been disappointed, and that was in 2006, the only time that we couldn't book our home-from-home, the Youth Centre next to St Johns in the Vale Church.

One of the things that has always kept things fresh has been the way these weekends have evolved. One year Bob Garland volunteered to cook a vegetable curry for everyone. This worked brilliantly, but it seemed unfair to expect any particular person to undertake feeding this number of people. So began the 'communal meal' where everyone contributes something to eat and/or drink, and the whole group sit down to dine together. I may be biased, but I think there are very few club occasions that can compare with these feasts!

On a personal note, I had three good long mountain runs, a short local run and the hash – thanks to Bob for organising that! Not bad for three days. The weekend was every bit as good as I hoped it would be.