

## RHAC 12-stage Northern Relay 1994

In the club's April Exec Committee meeting, very efficiently held with Zoom App, two clear wishes at least were expressed: we needed to get newsletters out asap, and we needed to date and organise our in-club relays in Clifton Park.

Regrettably, the latter has again proved elusive, and we can claim that this time it's not our fault after two (or is it three?) years failing to fit the event into the club and race calendar. But we do regard them as important- they bring club members together, they are supportive of improvement and development, they prepare runners for inter-club competition where relays are the primary means of judging club status on road.

So again I can say: we aim to hold the event as soon as we can. Whimsically, however, there is this proviso: the best venue for us is Clifton Park. Since we cannot guarantee good weather we need to book the Garden Centre as a base (also for IT equipment, which is a major factor on the night). Last year when we tried (a bit too late) someone had booked the Garden Centre for a wedding.

A major concern therefore is whether we can get a booking (whenever the time comes round) or will we get upstaged yet again? After lockdown there is concern there will be a big call on the facilities for christening parties.....

I have personally tried to get some routine file-keeping going during my supposedly 'shielded' time. Eating, drinking (not before 6pm), sunbathing, running (50-mile weeks) and recovery from being knackered do get in the way. Anyway I have made a start on getting my newsletter stack (100 or more) on line- or back on line in some cases. Naturally, some of the older ones (pre-IT, pre-internet, pre-mobile) are not pictorially elegant but they served an important purpose.

So this, coupled with the 'relay' theme this week has driven me to offer you a bit of club history.

### RHAC 1994: Northern 12-Stage Relay

I started the production line of newsletters in late 1993. There had been newsletters before that, but sporadically- either occasional booklets or badly-typed note sheets (more of that another time).

At that time, we had never qualified to run in the National Road Relays. To qualify, a men's team of 12 had to finish in the top 20 in their own region (north, south, midland). We never achieved that despite fielding some fine-looking teams not short of top runners.

I was Road Secretary at the time: my contact and social group at that time included Peter Neal, Nigel Brookes, Alan Gregory, and a relative newcomer Steve Gaines who had joined us after Bingley, Morpeth, and a job relocation to South Yorks.

Put briefly, we were convinced that poor organisation, preparation and delivery on the day was the issue rather than running ability. The runners themselves, in a November 1993 meeting saw it that way too and a general resolve to sort it was put into effect. I gave it 100% but could not have got anywhere without the club's runners as a whole, and key players such as those mentioned, with Peter as team captain, vocal backing and action from such vital clubmen as Mark Ruddleston and John Comrie.

A top development was the support of top coach Arthur Oxley, who had come back to Rotherham and brought with him Dave Hindmarsh and from Hull AC Dave Tune, Paul Rowland, and Lee Collingwood. (I think Arthur's daughter Janet (Hindley) was already a member). Tragically, Arthur died suddenly not long before the 1994 Northern 12-stage and there was great concern about the future of the athletes, but David and his colleagues were to play key roles in what followed.

Mea Culpa: I made a key mistake (not the last!) and allowed friends and family to organise an Easter holiday in Belgium (before the 12-stage date was known). Disaster. I frankly did not trust the club's organisers to get the job done properly but fortunately Jim Brogan agreed to take the team to Sunderland on the day.

I clearly remember phoning Peter Neal to get the results of the race. I was in a phone box just off the seafront of a dark, windswept Ostend (windswept? It was a hurricane). Peter quite calmly informed me that we had qualified: why wouldn't we? And qualified well.)

The rest of my holiday, cold though it was, seemed suddenly a lot sunnier. We consequently did go to Sutton Park for the National, but Dave, Lee and Paul had already fixed up training abroad so we didn't do that well. But it was the first of regular successes in qualifying and we were to have some outstanding results in the 12 and 6-stage.

The ladies never needed to qualify, there was no such rule. They have in more recent years equalled and surpassed the men's team performances with Nigel Brookes; the joint excursions with Peter Shaw's 12/6 teams have been highly successful and give or take an occasional lapse, RHAC is now a highly resilient respected club.

Failure breeds failure, success breeds success. Never truer.

Ref: Online: pdfs of paper newsletters for 1994 March and April