

# HERCULES WIMBLEDON ATHLETIC CLUB

[www.herculeswimbledonac.org.uk](http://www.herculeswimbledonac.org.uk)



**NEWSLETTER November 2007**  
New Issue Number 6 Editor: Pete Mulholland

## From the Editor

It's been a long time coming, but finally here is an HW Newsletter, the first since July of last year.

Much of the content here was inputted during the 2006 summer months, and I have kept some of the material in situ as I believe that it should be on record.

Much has happened during the past year with arguably the highlight being the promotion to Division One of the Sweatshop Surrey Men's Cross-Country League, courtesy of HW ending the season as CHAMPIONS of Division Two.

There has been a marked increase in the number of members competing in the Surrey Ladies League and the club have in their midst some promising youngsters – boys and girls – which augurs well for the future. Witness their promotion in the National Young Athletes League last year for evidence.

Sadly in this issue, there is news of the death of Dereje Kebede, who was on the fringes of British international selection and Mike Varah. Added to this was the departure of Jonathan Burgess, one of the leading lights on the British cross-country U15 boys' scene, to Australia and, although not such a long journey, Alex Bodin's move to Belgrave Harriers was another loss of a fine, young talent.

The Summer season kicked off well with the women winning the first fixture in the Southern League: 'their first such victory for almost two decades' was reported in the local press and after their fine performance in the Sward and Kinnaird Trophy Meeting, hopes were high for the men's section in their task of finally gaining promotion to Division One of the Southern League.

However, it wasn't to be which is frustrating really as the club have the talent within their midst to attain a much higher profile in these meetings and promotion should be a mere formality.

Take a look at Wimbledon Park track on any Tuesday evening and the place is heaving with HW members taking part in some intensive training sessions. But in many instances this energy fails to get transposed to the competitive arena which – in my opinion – is the sole reason for training.

An exception to the lack of taking part has been with the Senior Men's 'sprint and jumps' section which has supplied the goods during this past season league fixtures.

Many a discussion has taken place at HW General Committee as to what can be done to improve the situation and with some interesting theories and objectives being debated it could be a case of 'watch this space.'

The U15/U17 boys have also provided some of the highlights of the year and in this section of the National Young Athletes League, they have more than held their own in matching anything that the opposition has had to offer.

## HW TRAINING SESSIONS – OPEN TO ALL

Hercules Wimbledon training sessions take place for all ages at Wimbledon Park track every Tuesday and Thursday from 6:30 onwards. For the younger athletes - seven-year-old and upwards - there are also sessions on Sunday mornings starting at 10:30. All standards welcome – beginners or experienced: male and female.

Organised pack runs – over three and five miles - are held from Lauriston Cottage, Lauriston Road, Southside Wimbledon Common, on Wednesday evening, leaving at 7pm sharp.

During the summer months the Wednesday 'brigade' enjoys the pleasures of running over the beautiful acres of Wimbledon Common but now, various – and hopefully interesting routes around the adjoining roads are incorporated.

## RESULTS – RESULTS – RESULTS

Since January of this year, Pete Mulholland has, on a weekly basis, been forwarding by e-mail, results of events involving HW members and the service has been well received from the 120 plus recipients (which includes former members and other interested parties).

The results are later transposed on a monthly basis to the Hercules Wimbledon AC website [www.herculeswimbledonac.org.uk](http://www.herculeswimbledonac.org.uk) which should in the future present a permanent record of the club's competitive activities.

If anyone reading this wishes to take advantage of this weekly results service just send an e-mail to me at [petehwac@aol.com](mailto:petehwac@aol.com)

In view of the above, future issues of the Newsletter will not carry results in full, mainly because of the amount of space they would take up, but obviously any of merit will be highlighted. Hopefully this will make the Newsletter more of a read and not just a collection of results.

### MEN OF BRONZE IN THE SURREY RELAYS

**September 8:** Showing signs of what could prove to be a fine winter for the club, HW men kicked off the season by coming away with bronze medals in the Surrey County AA Road Relays held at Wimbledon Park.

HW made a habit of winning this event some 30 plus years ago – many of our older readers will remember excellent battles at Woking and later at Walton - but this was the best ever position achieved, since the event moved to this venue on a permanent basis in 1998: a good sign for the long months that lie ahead.

For the record, the medal winning team was Jamie Helmer, Deon Coetzee, Justin Kelly, Kieran White, Arnaud Claverie and Gary Blesson.

Interestingly, our two recent signings, the Egyptians Belal Aly and Hamed Hussein, both ineligible for the 'A' team, found themselves in second place after the opening two stages.

The women of HW were also out in greater numbers than usual with Team Manager Janet Fernando fielding no less than seven runners with the 'A' team finishing in a respectful sixth place with Jennifer Fernando, Anastasia Hancock, Michaela Knespl and Rosemary Fernando cutting a dash.

### MEDALS AND RECORDS FOR GEOFF

While the athletes of HW were making their mark on the domestic scene, Geoff Walcott was blazing to glory at the World Masters Championships being held in Riccione, Italy.

In spite of a throat infection that saw Geoff confined to bed during his non-competitive days out there, he came away with bronze in the M55 400m after making the finals in both the 100m and 200m.

However, it got even better on the final day when Geoff won gold as part of the Great Britain team in the 4x100m and the 4x400m, both of which decimated the previous M55 world records.

### HW MEN QUALIFY FOR THE NATIONALS

**September 29:** In arguably, the club's best performance for many a year, the six-man squad of Jamie Helmer, Justin Kelly, Hamed Hussein, Belal Aly, Philip Glynn and Neil Fraser come home 25<sup>th</sup> in the highly competitive South of England Road Relays, to clinch selection for the National Championship.

Perusal of the club archives suggests that this is the first time that HW has secured such a qualification.

### SURREY COUNTY SILVER FOR THE U15s

**October 6:** More Surrey medals as the U15 boys gave the powerful Aldershot team at Guildford a bit of a fright as the trio of Joe Toomey, Ed Saywell and Liam White chased them all the way.



Team mascot Tilly proudly fronts the HW U15 Surrey Relay Silver Medal team.

**October 7:** The 47<sup>th</sup> running of the Geoff Moulden Wimbledon 10, now under the control of Richard Xerri after many years of sterling work by Tom Pollak, was considered an ‘all-round’ success with many favourable comments being received.

There was a touch of class up front with Huw Lobb taking the honours while Lucy Hasell won the women’s event for the third successive year.

Also good to see the HW men winning the team race, while the HW women’s team, led home by Claire Grima in second place, took third.

Another bonus was the 211 finishers, quite an increase on recent years and yes, there were problems, but lessons have been learned.

**October 13:** After a decade of floundering in Division Two of the Sweatshop Surrey League, the Senior Men cautiously approached the hotbed of Division One and surprised many with their resultant fifth place from the nine teams contesting this opening fixture on Wimbledon Common.

Led home by ‘come back kid, Aidan Hogan in 17<sup>th</sup> position, top 50 placings by Jamie Helmer, Justin Kelly and Phil Glynn set the team on their way, which hopefully, with the return of some absentees, augurs well for the remaining fixtures.

The U17/U15 HW team led home by second place Andrew Penney and first U15 Liam White in fourth, secured second, just three points behind South London Harriers.

Other featured HW athletes in a top-10 placing were Deyan Knespl, Ed Saywell and Geordie Logan.

A bit low on U13 athletes today but Max Cooper stood out with his third place.

**October 13:** Under the leadership of new Team Manager Janet Fernando, HW was encouraged by the appearance of 12 runners today in this opening Surrey Ladies League fixture on the tough Esher course. Probably the best turn out by the club for many a year.

Pick of the bunch were Jennifer and Rosemary Fernando, fourth and seventh respectively who with back up by Hannah Long saw HW finish second team in the U17 event.

Best of the U15s was 11<sup>th</sup> placed Michaela Knespl who led the team home to a fine fifth place.

Eleanor Smith-Hahn, albeit too young to score, surprised many of her ‘elders’ by placing fourth out of 46 competitors in the U13 race.

With the influx of senior women that have joined HW of late, Janet has high hopes of even greater numbers turning out in the remaining league fixtures.

**October 20:** It was a ‘trial by fire’ as the HW Senior Men competed at Sutton Coldfield in the AAA National 6-stage Road Relays.

Judging by the leading times, this was one of the classiest races in this event for many a year, and the HW lads knew that they had been in a race, finishing 56<sup>th</sup> out of the 79 teams that finished.

Still, all credit for the team in deciding to compete as these are the type of events that the club must aim for, not only to give impetus to the current crop of club members (including youngsters) but also to attract athletes seeking a higher level of competition.

Only three Surrey based clubs competed today with Belgrave running out as impressive winners while HW took the scalp of recent Surrey League winners, Thames Hare & Hounds.

**October 20:** All in all it was a successful day for HW at the Surrey Veterans Cross Country Championships in Richmond Park with team medals and individual medals coming our way.

First off was Estle Viljoen, who after leading after the first lap came home as runner-up but qualified as first W35 home. Estle is unique in having taken Surrey County Gold medals this year for both walking and running.

More gold for HW with Steve Badgery taking the individual M60 title which was all the more remarkable as over 40 years ago he won Surrey County cross-country titles as an U15, U17 and U20: surely the longest ever time-span for winning a county cross-country title. With Steve being backed up by Martin Miller and Maurice Sharp, HW provided a conclusive M60 winning team.

To add to the flavour of the M60 scene, Alan Turner and Paul Roche returned to racing having in recent years enjoyed a training rivalry from Lauriston Cottage.

Silver team medals were earned by the M50 trio of Hugh Saxby, Simon Ingall and Martin O’Halloran.



Estle (4) sharing the early pace with winner Pippa Major (45), Ruth Hutton (42) and Clare Pauzers (37).  
*Photo by Ray O’Donoghue*

**October 20:** Just nine days after celebrating his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, Liam White finishes second in the Wimbledon Common Time Trial 5km with a stunning time of 16:47, the third fastest by an HW first claim member this year.

Note: the Time Trial is held **every** Saturday at 9am from close by the Windmill car park and the run is free of charge to enter. If it doesn't clash with any HW fixtures, the event is worth doing just as a sharp work-out.

### **HAPPY 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY FOR HW**

It was 40 years ago in September 1967 that Hercules AC and Wimbledon AC amalgamated to form what is now known as Hercules Wimbledon AC.

To mark the occasion, Maurice Sharp spent many hours trying to cajole 40 club members to compete in the Surrey League races.

With 36 in the men's league and 12 in the women's league, Maurice was just two short of his target (hope no one is feeling guilty reading this!)

After the men's race, the runners and supporters retired to nearby Lauriston Cottage to not only enjoy a slice of superb Anniversary cake but also to be presented with especially struck souvenir mugs, while many of the women were presented with their cake and mugs at training the following Tuesday.

With fine weather being the order of the day the occasion was an enjoyable one and it was good to see the likes of Roger Smith and Paul Moulton.

### **ADVICE FROM THE PAST**

"As regards an amateur's training the main points are: Rise at about seven, have a cold bath and grooming with rough towel before breakfast, and eat plain nourishing food, avoiding soups, pastries and anything indigestible.

Tea drinking is very bad for some. Cocoa I find better than tea in my own case. Smoking is fatal to the wind, and the man in training must learn to pass the public-house without dropping in for a throat gargle. Hot, stuffy rooms should be avoided and fresh air taken at every opportunity. Be careful not to run too soon either before or after meals.

Three spins of about five miles each per week will keep most men in condition, though others require to run almost every day to show their very best."

*From the chapter 'Hints on Cross-Country Running' by Sid Thomas (Ranelagh Harriers) in 'Athletics' by H. Hewitt Griffin, published 1891.*

Thanks to Ranelagh Harriers e-news for above.

### **ADVICE FROM THE PRESENT**

Running isn't a sport for pretty boys with visions of grandeur. It's about the sweat in your hair and the blisters on your feet. It's about the frozen spit on your chin and the nausea in your gut. It's about throbbing calves and cramps at midnight that are strong enough to wake the dead. It's about getting out the door and running when the rest of the world is dreaming about having the passion that you need to live each and every day with. It's about being on a lonely road and running like a champion even when there's not a single soul in sight to cheer you on. . . . Running is all about having the desire to train and persevere until every individual fibre in your legs, heart, and mind is turned to steel. And when you're finally forged hard enough you will have become the best runner you can be. And that's all that you can ask for.  
*Paul Maurer: "The Gift, a Runner's Story"*

### **Some news from David Burgess of Jonathan resident in Australia from the end of last year**

'Jonathan's school is very strong in XC and he's able to train three or four times a week with good coaches. Progress towards the Australian Championships is by regional selection with races over 4k in his age group (Jono's an U16 here) and his first major regional race was the Metropolitan North Brisbane Championships (it's the equivalent of our schools county championships). Jonathan won this on a hilly course in 13:49 beating last year's winner by 12 seconds. The next race was the Queensland Schools Championships in Townsville (a 2 hour flight north from us in Brisbane!) where Jon had a setback - he was going well in third place when he suffered a small tear in a calf muscle 2/3rds through the race, he carried on and finished 15th in 13:00 but he didn't think this would be good enough to make the Queensland team for the Australian Championships but he was selected in the 6-strong Queensland Athletics team as they looked at other performances during the season.

All in all he's very pleased with his recovery from the broken leg and his first season and hopefully he will be fit for the Australian Championships, which is in September in Perth (a 5.1/2 hour flight from Brisbane - and I used to think Nottingham was a long way to go to race!).'

*The following is correspondence from Paul Williams just one the many former HW members who still take a keen interest in the club's affairs. It was received some time ago, just after the last Newsletter in fact, but it's well worth publishing.*

It was always with eager anticipation that I use to await the arrival of the latest bound edition of Team Spirit. I could check through Jon Owen's meticulous compilation of that years Track & Field Rankings and updates to the All Time Top Ten listings. I always thought there was a spot for me somewhere between Pete Clarke's and Steve Vary's 1:52:53 – how wrong you can be. So, it was great to receive the latest incarnation in the form of a PDF Newsletter from Pete. The format has continued to improve over the years and I was delighted to see the content is as good as ever.

That old adage “the older I get, the better I was” is certainly true but the fire always burns like a pilot light inside. It was with a huge grin that I read John Phelan's recent contribution. But his claim that he has a photo of a short hill session showing him leading me out really stoked that flame. I had to think for two days solid as to where that could be and then I remembered Ray O'D's wonderful knack of manipulating his running photos and realised it must have been some kind of trick that defied all scientific investigation.

I heard another saying recently – “don't look back unless you can grin, don't look forward unless you can smile.” And it is with great fondness that I recall running past my double English A Level class on my way to another stuffing on the Lunchtime 6 from the likes of Mike Barratt, Alan Turner, John Roberts, Keith Wallis, John Mather, Fred Bell and yes, I have to admit, Carl Cross. But not Dave Williams, 'cos he always cut off the last field... and the corners, according to Mike! Mind you, you could always cut those corners as Phelan had been round pruning back the hedges as soon as the good weather arrived. Yes, I did pass that English exam, but only just, and it was probably as much down to JH's poetry soliloquies as anything learnt from photocopied notes. I'm sure I quoted from Solomon in my Hamlet essay (you know the one John...“all men are mariner's...”). Anyhow, I'm sure the Editor will correct my grammar before publication.

I recall people assuming that Lauriston was a foreboding place and perhaps it could be. But my brother and I always received a warm welcome

(many of whom were HW team mates) and I am sure this was down to the fact that we were pretty much the only two youngsters that the vet contingency could still beat. That changed for Peter over the years and he added some big name scalps to, what cyclists would term, their palmares. Most athletes have at least one “Golden Year” (I remember Steve Webb's) and in 1989/1990 Pete pretty much swept all before him in the HW/Lauriston Championships. We always thought that it was no coincidence that each time Peter won a Lauriston spoon, that event was swiftly removed from the following year's Championships. And of course, he should have been honoured with the Founder's Prize that season – surely, you didn't think I was going to let that drop - oh the injustice of those secret committee meetings!!

That is the great thing about most sports, if you train hard and get a decent injury free period, the results will flow. And the opportunity to train and be trained was plentiful. From Maurice Sharp's track sessions at Wimbledon Park to John Sullivan's A Squad, Lauriston's regular group runs plus a few sneaky sessions in between, something had to pay off. And many times it did. The divine distribution of talent didn't always seem fair but the determination of many of the mortals was World Class and if you beat a team mate you knew you'd earned it.

Looking at the results from the Newsletter it's great to see a hatful of medals at the Surrey Championships and good turnouts at the traditional league events. It's incredible to see that the same stalwarts of HW are still organising the training/races/refreshments and just about everything else (does Stu Littlewood still run the mobile disco!?!). (Ed: He does) I know from organising a few cycling races that how important these unsung heroes are in making any event a success. To steal another cycling term, chapeaux (“hats off”) to them.

That's it for now - apart from to wish everyone at Lauriston and HW all the best.

*Ed: Pete Williams was good enough to clock 32:33 for 10km in 1987: it may 'only' rank 21<sup>st</sup> in the HW all-time rankings but it's a time that would stand him in good stead today. Arguably Pete's best ever road performance was his 35:33 in the 1990 HW/Lauriston 7, still good enough for seventh on that event's all-time.*

*With the lack of a club newsletter these two fine obituaries by Tom Pollak for Dereje Kebede and Mike Varah were not given the circulation they warranted, and also they should appear on record: hence their appearance here at this late stage:*

### **Dereje Kebede 1981-2006**

It is with deep regret that Hercules Wimbledon Athletic Club report the death of Dereje Kebede who was a member of the winning Ethiopian team at the IAAF World half-marathon championships in Bristol in October 2001.

His performance in Bristol where he finished 62nd in a personal best of 64:30, an improvement of almost two minutes on his previous best half-marathon time, was probably the highlight of his short and traumatic life.

Kebede's father was murdered when he was just seven and although he was in the Ethiopian police force he was subjected to considerable ill-treatment. Despite knowing that he would be leaving his family behind (his mother and sister still live in Ethiopia), Kebede decided to seek asylum in Britain.

He joined Hercules Wimbledon towards the end of 2002 and regularly raced in road running events across the country setting course records in the Leeds half-marathon and the Stratford Shakespeare half-marathon in 2005.

He was also a talented cross-country runner, finishing runner-up in the Surrey cross country championship at Banstead in January 2003. He was selected to run in the UK Inter-Counties championship that year. He also won the South of the Thames five miles race in Richmond Park in November 2005.

Soon after that he settled in Britain and came under the care of Dr Michael Korzinski, a clinical psychiatrist at the Medical Foundation for the Victims of Torture in London. Dr Korzinski arranged for Kebede to live in various hostels around the Capital.

Last year, he arranged for Kebede to spend two months training in Kenya. Unfortunately, he appeared to have picked up a bug while in Africa and when he returned to London he fell ill. He was treated at University College, London where experts from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine were unable to identify what was ailing him but they did discover he was

suffering from epilepsy and he was put on medication to treat his condition.

In March this year, he was granted British citizenship and his aim was to run for Britain at the Beijing Olympics. Earlier this year he moved into his own flat in Islington. It was there that he was found dead on June 5.

A post mortem failed to identify the cause of death although it is thought it was related to the epileptic seizures he had been experiencing.

Ceri Diss of Roehampton University's Sports Performance Assessment and Rehabilitation Centre gave Kebede sport science support and along with the rest of his support team assisted in raising the necessary funds to enable Kebede's body to be flown back to Ethiopia and buried alongside his father.

### **MIKE VARAH 1944 - 2007**

Mike Varah who died from pneumonia on April 2, aged 62, was not only a top class middle-distance runner more than four decades ago but also gained a reputation as an outstanding officer in the probation service; serving for many years as chief probation officer in Surrey before stepping down early in April 2004.

He took up athletics when at Spencer Park School, Wandsworth, in 1961 when he found "I could run a bit faster than those at school with me and consequently I began training to improve and see exactly how far I could go."

He came under the coaching regime of RFR "Killer" Clarke, a master at Wandsworth School and an outstanding athletics coach with the former Hercules Athletic Club, particularly with pole vaulters. (At one time his pole vaulting squad under the old tilly lights at Tooting Bec running track included all of Britain's top pole vaulters).

While a PE student at Loughborough College, Varah was coached by Olympic 400m runner Robbie Brightwell but after graduating from the college he once again came under Clarke's supervision.

He progressed from a modest 880 yards club runner to a notable international and his best times were 1961: 2:20.0; 1962: 2:08.2; 1963: 1:59.9; 1964: 1:55.5; 1965: 1:51.2; 1966: 1:48.5; 1967: 1:48.2. The latter was achieved when he finished fourth in the AAA Championships at London's White City and lifted him to ninth place on the then UK all-time list. He was at one time holder of

the UK all-comers indoor 880 yards best with 1:51.4.

He also had a best 440 yards time of 49.2 (48.3 relay leg) and a best 1500m time of 3:49.1.

He was Surrey 880 yards champion in 1966 (1:49.6). He ran the second leg in 1:48.9 for the British team that broke the world record for 4 x 880y with 7:14.6 at Crystal Palace, London on June 22, 1966, but the record was disallowed because a false time was called out to one of the other team members. The other team members were Graeme Grant (1:49.5), Chris Carter (1:48.0) and John Boulter (1:48.2). Carter, a retired police officer, is current secretary of the South of England Athletic Association.

Varah ran in four internationals for Great Britain in 1966 and 1967 and was fourth in his heat at the 1966 Commonwealth Games in Jamaica.

He won the UAU 800 yards title at Loughborough in 1967 and the following year South of England 880 yards title at Motspur Park.

He continued to run for the merged Hercules Wimbledon AC until he retired at the end of the 1969 season.

Hercules Wimbledon's former Surrey cross country champion Bob Holt, like club mates Fred Green, Mike Fuller and Mike Kortzenray, a contemporary of Varah's, recalled: "I have two distinct memories of Mike. One was at a training evening at Nobby Clarke's Winter Monday night circuit training at Wandsworth School. The session often ended with some sort of speed or hill work out on the roads near the school and on this particular occasion Mike had no training shoes with him, only a pair of spikes. (He had done the circuit training in either bare or stockinged feet). He therefore donned a pair of thick socks over his spikes and ran on thus attired. I don't think it did his calves much good!

"My other memory was of an episode when he and I (plus my brother Dave) were at a training camp for British "Olympic Possibles" in May 1968 at the high altitude venue at Font Romeu in the French Pyrenees. An impromptu volleyball match took place one afternoon at the indoor arena between a team of British athletes and a French athletes' team. During the match, some of the British "supporters" (primarily the college members amongst us) struck up a rendering of a very rude version of the "Marseillaise" and one of the ring leaders in this jollity was Mike Varah. The

French team responded at the end by doing a collective "moonie".

George Peter Michael Varah, who was born on October 19 1944, was the son of Chad Varah, the founder of the Samaritans and co-founder of the Eagle comic, who is still alive aged 95.

Mike, who was one of a set of triplets, taught at Rugby School for five years before joining the probation service. He was Chief Probation Officer for Surrey from 1988 to 2004 when he took early retirement apparently disillusioned with the restructuring of the service and its lack of resources. His decision to retire early resulted in a question being asked by South West Surrey MP Virginia Bottomley in the House of Commons who wanted the Home Secretary to look into the reasons for his early departure. She pointed out that under his leadership Surrey ranked third out of the 42 probation services in the UK. A notice in the April edition of the National Probation Service Bulletin described him as "a pioneer of the service."

Varah continued to serve the community by joining Surrey Crimestoppers and was its chairman at the time of his death. He was also Deputy Lieutenant of Surrey and High Sheriff in Nomination.



Motspur Park, 21.5.1966. MIKE VARAH (2) leads from JIM JOHNSON (19). photo by Mark Shearman.

The sharp-sighted may spot a young Fred Green peering over the shoulders of numbers 19 and 1 during this Surrey 880 yards final

Ed: No apologies for the lateness of the following article as a) it's a good read, and b) it should be of interest to those who have raced on the Common.

## AN AMERICAN IN SW19

One of the competitors in the HW Inter Club Cross Country match in December 2004 held over the standard 5-mile course was former Boston Marathon winner Amby Burfoot.

Amby is an Executive Editor of the American version of *Runner's World* magazine, and as such was visiting to research an article relating to the fact that Wimbledon was the birthplace of two major sports, namely cross-country running and tennis.

The first ever open cross-country race took place on Wimbledon Common on December 7, 1867, while the first modern tennis championships were held less than half a mile away in Worple Road, SW19 on July 9, 1877.

Fine writer that he, Amby gives a vivid recollection of that 2004 race, details of which are scattered among a lengthy nine-page article in the July, 2006 issue of *Runner's World* (USA), and it should prove of interest to the many HW runners who have contested the familiar course.

'Three minutes after beginning my warm-up jog on Wimbledon Common, I am utterly lost. Trails go every which way – wide equestrian boulevards, curving dirt paths for walkers and runners, single track for mountain bikers. Normally, I would consider this profusion of trails a rare treasure.

My host, John Bryant, once a low 2:20s marathoner, say he can run 20 miles on the 1,140-acre common without ever retracing his steps. I'd like to take a meandering tour of the same kind. Only I've got a date to keep, and the clock is ticking.

My race entry was arranged by Bryant who said I would find the start next to the Thatched Cottage. The same location was repeated by several other runners in the 1666 Lauriston Cottage, adjacent to the Common, where I checked in and changed.

The Thatched Cottage sounds easy to locate, so I set out to find it. In minutes I get lost on the serpentine trails. When an elderly couple appears, I seek help. "The cottage is over that-a-way," they point. "Only it doesn't have roof anymore."

Okay, no problem. I begin running that-a-way. Three or four minutes later, I am surrounded by copse of hardwood trees. I do several slow 360s

but spot no cottage. Another runner comes trotting along. "You going to the cross-country race?" I ask hopefully, "I can't find the Thatched Cottage." "Sure, just follow me," he says. "It's easy to get lost out here, and the Thatched cottage got torn down a few years back."

My guide leads me to a small clearing, where 70 to 80 runners are warming up. I drop my backpack under an evergreen, strip off my sweats, and do a few quick strides. The weather couldn't be better, low 50s, an occasional hint of blue sky overhead.

The starter (Ed: that's me) calls us to the line, which like the Thatched Cottage doesn't exist. But we are gentle men and women, so we arrange ourselves along an imaginary start. I know little about what lies ahead, only that we'll run two laps to cover five miles in total. Still, looking down the row of poised runners, feeling the soft turf underfoot, hearing a ruffle of breeze and scanning the unbroken horizon of trees, shrubs, meadows and pathways, I realise that I am deliriously happy. Cross-country running has always made me feel this way.

Then there is a disturbance behind us. A solitary runner is sprinting our way. Wait for me!" he yells. "Wait for me!"

The pack erupts in a storm of protest. "No don't wait, let's get started right now." "Give him a five-minute penalty.

"I break into laughter. I have heard this sort of black banter – running buddies poking fun at each other – thousands of times. We will wait; we know that. It is the right and proper thing to do. Still the comments ring true all the way to my DNA. I am at home here. I may not know any of my fellow racers. Or the course. Or how I will fare. But I am at home.

### The race is on

A crisp "Ready, set, go," gets our race started, and we scoot across the clearing, the only flat part of the course. The rest will be up, down and oftentimes slanted. After 300 yards, we veer left and descend a steep, tree-shrouded gully. I'm wearing a thin pair of racing flats and can feel every ridge, root and rock under the slippery leaves. When a half-dozen runners hurtle past, I get that sinking feeling: Am I going to finish last? Still, I stick to my strategy. Start modestly, try to hold pace, avoid bloodshed at all costs.

We emerge from the deep gully, swerve sharply left around a thick tree, and begin running in rough



grass beside several soccer fields. Another hard left, and we are at the low edge of the common, fording small rivulets, scrambling through brush and thorns. I might not finish unblooded after all. But at least I am holding my own; no one passes. How could they? The trail is one-half body width wide.

When the twisting course widens and turns upslope, I gain on several runners, until I hear the rasp of spiked shoes in rocky soil, and see the blood. Someone has a spike wound just above the ankle. I slow, thinking to avoid the fray. Then, unexpectedly I have a vision: I am competing in a 1950s track race with Roger Bannister, Chris Chataway, Emil Zatopek, Sandor Iharos, Vladimir Kuts and all the greats I read about in my youth. We are sprinting off the final curve, arms flailing, faces tortured, leg wounds aplenty. I don't normally suffer such delusions when I run. Here, however, the sound of spikes and the streak of blood conjure up another era. An even stronger catalyst: I am enveloped by the timeless wonder of Wimbledon Common.

Soon we are crossing the field where we started and beginning a second lap. I have no idea how I got back to the start. I couldn't have been more surprised if I had looked up and found myself at the foot of Big Ben. I try to pay more attention to my surroundings the second time around but it's not easy. The common presents a new challenge at every turn, demanding a total concert of balance, cardio fitness, and leg strength. Some might consider this a nightmare. Not me. I grow progressively more fatigued yet remain enthralled by the effort.

Then the start/finish line appears again. I accelerate and accidentally scrape the heel of the runner ahead of me. I hate this, it's so mortifying to interfere with another runner. I stop nearly dead in my tracks to let him get clear. He looks untroubled, so I recover, and kick again. This time I sweep wide and cross the line a metre ahead of him. A moment later, I seek him out, offer a hand, say, "Thanks for the good race."

He rebuffs me, and turns away. "Would have beaten you if you hadn't tripped me," he snarls.

These guys take their cross-country seriously, and the results prove it. Among the 75 finishers, I am 31<sup>st</sup> in 34:49. In my 55-59 age group, I place seventh. Two weeks earlier, I had run a

Thanksgiving Day road race in Connecticut with 12,000 others and won my age group.

### **Post haste to meet up with a legend**

After finishing the five-miler, I dash over to the tree where I have stored my bag and wiggle into my sweats. I have another Wimbledon Common date to keep. If I hustle, I can catch the legendary Chris Chataway. He too is running on the common this afternoon, in another race that started an hour after mine and follows a different course.

I seek out Chataway in the milling (post-race) crowd to ask how racing on Wimbledon Common has changed in his lifetime.

"It has hardly changed at all," he says immediately. "The common has been well preserved and the atmosphere is exactly the same. Cross-country is still a social sport for the participants, It is a convivial affair. Track was always very different. We didn't make friends in track. It was full of fear and trepidation. Cross-country is where you made your friendships."

*Reprinted with the permission of Runner's World (USA) magazine.*

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### **Thoughts of Chairman Brendan (Foster) - by Geoff Harrold**

He's running sensibly (What on earth is he doing?)

She's keeping out of trouble (She's last)

He's taking closer order (He's going to trip up)

She's taking the shortest route (She's boxed in)

Four laps to go - he will have run this distance

many times before in training (He's never run this fast before and is about to drop out)

She is the leading European in this race (She is the only European in this race)

He's responded to the challenge (He's dropped out)

She's running easily (She's warming up)

I think he is in trouble (He's lined up for the start)

I ran this part of the course this morning (I've run out of things to say)

I don't know why she keeps looking at her watch (The concept of projected finish time minus time elapsed multiplied by average miles per hour is completely beyond me)

*The above appears on the Enfield & Haringey AC web-site and is reproduced with permission of the author - who also happens to be their webmaster!*



Hercules Wimbledon Athletic Club is celebrating achieving clubmark status, the first athletic club in London south of the River Thames to do so, writes Tom Pollak.

Hercules Wimbledon is also only the sixth athletic club in the capital to gain a clubmark. It confirms the club is a safe, effective, child friendly and well run organisation. Bob Smith, manager of the London Region of England Athletics, said: "Congratulations are due to Hercules Wimbledon on becoming the sixth club in London to achieve Clubmark status."

Nick Getting, chairman of Hercules Wimbledon, welcomed the award. "It has taken us a long time to get this award and is the culmination of many hours of hard work by our voluntary officials. It confirms that Hercules Wimbledon is an effective and well run club, meeting the requirements and demands of the 21st century during the run-up to London 2012."

HW Tracksuits and vests – at bargain prices – are available at the track. Your training is geared to make you act the part: now why don't you also look the part. Remember: in League and Championship events, wearing a club vest is essential. See Pat Yeates.

Pete Mulholland also has a small number of long sleeved HW vests (medium and large) at a cost of £20.00.

Georgia Peel (Woking AC) set a Surrey County record of 4:37.0 for the U15 Girls 1500m at the Schools Inter-Counties held at Bedford on 16th June 2007. This improved the previous record of 4:39.4 set by Jena Mitchell (Hercules Wimbledon) in 1989.

Bob and Vic are passionate athletic-lovers. They go to events together, pore over old copies of Athletics Weekly and on chilly winter evenings they sit in the pub remembering what great performances there were. They decide that whoever dies first will try to come back and tell the other if there is athletics in heaven.

One summer night, Bob passes away in his sleep after watching Kelly Holmes winning her second Olympic title. He dies happy.

A few nights later Vic wakes up, certain that he can hear Bob calling to him from the other side. "Is that you, Bob?" he asks. "Yes, Vic, it's me," says Bob. "This is unbelievable!" exclaims Vic. "So, Bob, is it true? Is there athletics in heaven?" "Well," says Bob. "I have good news and bad news. The good news is that yes, there is athletics in heaven." "That's great!" says Vic. "What could possibly be the bad news?"

"You're running in the 5,000 metres tomorrow."

## 7-up

Pat Yeates '7upsanovers' group, which came into operation in September 2006 is still going strong every Sunday morning at Wimbledon Park, the sessions that run from 10am until 11am having been well attended since its inception.

Primarily, this is an introduction and a relaxed session into the joys of athletics for boys and girls age seven upwards. Some of the participants are becoming 'old hands' and this year's HW Young Athletes Meeting at Crystal Palace saw some of them competing in the U11 events.

If any members of HW have youngsters of their own or young nieces and nephews or young neighbours: spread the news.



The HW Summer Barbecue proved a great success

Ray O'Donoghue has been hard at work towards a production of a Hercules Wimbledon collage with the current standing being as below. Over the months and time permitting, he hopes to add to his results.



If you are reading this as a hard copy try and view on the HW website: the colour effect is stunning!

## Hercules Wimbledon AC Winter Fixtures 2007 – 2008

### November

3

10 Sweatshop Surrey Men's League, Division 1

10 Surrey Ladies League

17 South of Thames 5-mile Team Race

24 Inter-club 7 miles v Kingston & Poly

Wimbledon Common, Putney Vale

Cranford, Middlesex

Richmond Park, Petersham

Richmond Park, Sheen Gate

### December

1 Ranelagh H Ellis Trophy (Men)

1 Dysart Trophy (Women)

2 Surrey County AA U13/U15 Sportshall 2

6 Merton Schools Cross Country

8 HW Inter Club 5-mile

15 South of Thames Championship

22

25 Lauriston Paarlauf

29 HW/Lauriston 7-mile Road Race

Richmond Park, Petersham

Richmond Park, Petersham

The Spectrum. Guildford

Venue TBA

Wimbledon Common

Epsom Downs

Wimbledon Common

Wimbledon Common

### January

5 Surrey County AA Cross Country Championships

12 Sweatshop Surrey Men's League, Division 1

12 Surrey Ladies League

13 Surrey County AA U15/U13 Sportshall 3

19 East Surrey League Cross Country Relays

19 Surrey Schools Cross Country

26 South of England Championships

Lloyd Park, Croydon

Priory Park, Reigate

Priory Park, Reigate

The Spectrum, Guildford

Wimbledon Common

Reigate Priory

Parliament Hill Fields

### February

2 South of England AA Veterans Championships

9 Sweatshop Surrey Men's League, Division 1

9 Surrey Ladies League

16 Inter-Club v Bank of England AC

23 National Cross Country Championships

Ruislip

Richmond Park, Petersham

Richmond Park, Petersham

Richmond Park, Roehampton

Alton Towers

### March

1 Ranelagh H Inter Club

8 English Schools Championships

15 East Surrey League Road Relays

15 Inter Counties Championships

22

23 Easter Sunday

29

Richmond Park, Petersham

Liverpool

Box Hill, nr Dorking

Nottingham

### April

5 South of England 12 stage Road Relays

6 Hercules Wimbledon Young Athletes Meeting

8 East Surrey League Road Races

12

13 Flora London Marathon

13 adidas Mini Marathon

19

26

Aldershot

Crystal Palace

West Ewell

Greenwich

Southwark

### May

5 Barry Jones 5-mile Road Race

Wimbledon Park