

# Swansea Harriers Endurance Group update

*Posted by OWEN DAVIES on JUN 6, 2020*

I run with the thriving Senior and Masters group at Swansea Harriers, and have done for the last 5 years. Our Tuesday and Thursday group is for women and men, and the group has always been for those who run to a reasonable level already, and want to improve. We have runners who like any distance, but particularly those who like 5K upwards, all the way to ultra-marathons including fans of any surface; track, road, trail, cross country and multi terrain! Camaraderie and competitiveness have always kept us together and pushed us as a group, but the reality finally began to bite for the Endurance group, as group training was curtailed and the lockdown hit. The TnTs (as they were), otherwise known as the slightly older section of Swansea Harriers, the Endurance group, maintained maximum training time together right up until it became obvious we couldn't, facing social distancing expectations and potential lockdown.



Some of the group at last year's Whitford Point MT

When it came, it hit hard – no marathons or races on in April. And beyond that, who could say? We are a great group – overlapping with the Seniors occasionally ( usually, but not always a bit lower down the leader boards than the youngsters) – but fortunately Steve Taylor stepped up with the idea of a bit of ...what he called it...a bit of friendly competition.

He promised imaginary medals for prizes and everyone's respect and 'kudos' aplenty. For those that don't know, Strava and other such training partners have helped turn individual performance into a Virtual Team competition.



The rules were simple.... no, wait, the rules were complicated, and they changed regularly, to keep it fresh and vibrant! From Monday to Sunday of each week, we committed to running 26.2 miles ( the marathon) over the week. This would need to be in the fastest time possible, with male and female categories – 20-25 25-35 35-40 40-50 50-55 before finally arriving at the “Kneath Philippart and Robert Falconer’ category, reserved for the most injury prone and stalwart category alike. Make of that as you will, as I’m not sure Kneath contributed to week 1 but it was a kind gesture.

As extra incentive, virtual medals would be awarded for the following activities-

- Fastest 26.2 miles completed.
- Bonus if you pick up any Strava ‘crowns’ (fastest time over a particular route, or more often very small route!) you get a 5-minute reduction off your total time.
- Most elevation over the 26.2 miles in ft
- Most kudos or appreciative virtual ‘thumbs up’ per run over the 26.2 miles.

With that we were off, running in the real world against virtual opponents, taking advantage of as much social distance as we could. By the end of the week, as a group we had run over 770 miles and taken control of Strava segments from Gower to Port Talbot. The busiest, most competitive routes demanded the most effort, and it was soon evident that this would be a tactical effort over the week as well as challenging the legs to complete the minimum 26.2 miles. Apologies over (for the 26.2 minimum bar and suffering calves) Steve and other club members felt the need to spice it up with a bit with the idea of fancy dress that might entertain/ confuse anyone who might behold such sights from a window or prom bench. Thankfully Bernard Murphy topped the charts as Spiderman, Steven Taylor confirming where Wally was and Rob ran as himself to keep the interest levels above expected!



Bernard Murphy entertaining us all!



Up stepped Heath Brett, no nonsense, clocking the whole 26.2 in one go, with Strava as his witness, and all associated discussions of elapsed versus moving time remaining... in the past. I steadily focused my attention on one crown per day, enough for anyone surely?

With each week, Steve kept it fresh, though he offered some tips in the forecast rain:

1. Don't overdo the layers you're going to sweat and get wet anyway
2. Still take some water
3. Watch out for chaffing and blisters. (Nipples,feet)
4. You can still wear shorts.
5. Don't run through puddles as they may be potholes and deeper than you think!
6. Running off road will be slippery under foot so take your time.
7. Smile and feel revitalised.
8. Acknowledge other runners doing the same.
9. It always rains in Wales so running in the rain is a must.
10. You can do this!

And so the punishment... or training has continued. The aggregate miles and elevation built week by week, as we sought to outdo one another. Early winners for the fastest 26.2 were Gair McAdie with 3:06 and Penny Kennedy with 2:50, after establishing herself as the Queen of the Mountains, hotly contested by Helen-Marie Davies. Medals for the various categories were issued virtually by Steve Taylor with impressive turnaround time – Welsh Athletics take note!

For anyone within the club, or outside that would like the chance to meet like-minded runners and train in a supportive group environment. there is a varied programme, from short intervals to long tempo runs, sessions on track, cycle path, pavement, grass, beach and hills. It has always been a “no pressure” environment, if you ignore being urged on by our stalwart LIRFs: Kneath Phillipart, Paul Flynn, Thomas Guest, Dan Newton, Craig Jones, Vanessa Harragan, Rebecca Bennett, Simon Brewer, Helen-Marie Davies and Emily Marchant. The cost has always been relatively low with no charge for most training sessions, except for track sessions which are £3.

With that in mind, it is testament to the group and particularly Steve's motivation, that there has been a willingness to keep up that variation and even develop some virtual races. From afar, the strings were pulled to include a half marathon here, a 10k there, specific speed sessions and time trials. Highlights would have to be a 4:53 mile from Aled Tumelty, a half marathon PB for Tony Davies, and Julie Hartley-Green for hitting over 50 miles.

At this point , special mention must be made to Tina Gabb, who clocked over 90 miles in one week, by setting herself the challenge of running 10 half marathons in 10 days, and also Marc Hobbs who has to date been clocking 80 – 100 miles per week at a very respectable pace.



Not to be outdone on the creative front, to add a little fun to the competition, there was even time to include some Strava Art. By tracking routes with various devices, the GPS points might, if you thought ahead or were lucky, draw or write some marvellous piece of art. Robert Falconer dully obliged with a marvellous dog superimposed from Sketty (the back end!) to the River Tawe, whilst a few others contributed below!

11:27 ↗ 📶 🔋

[← Feed](#) **Run**

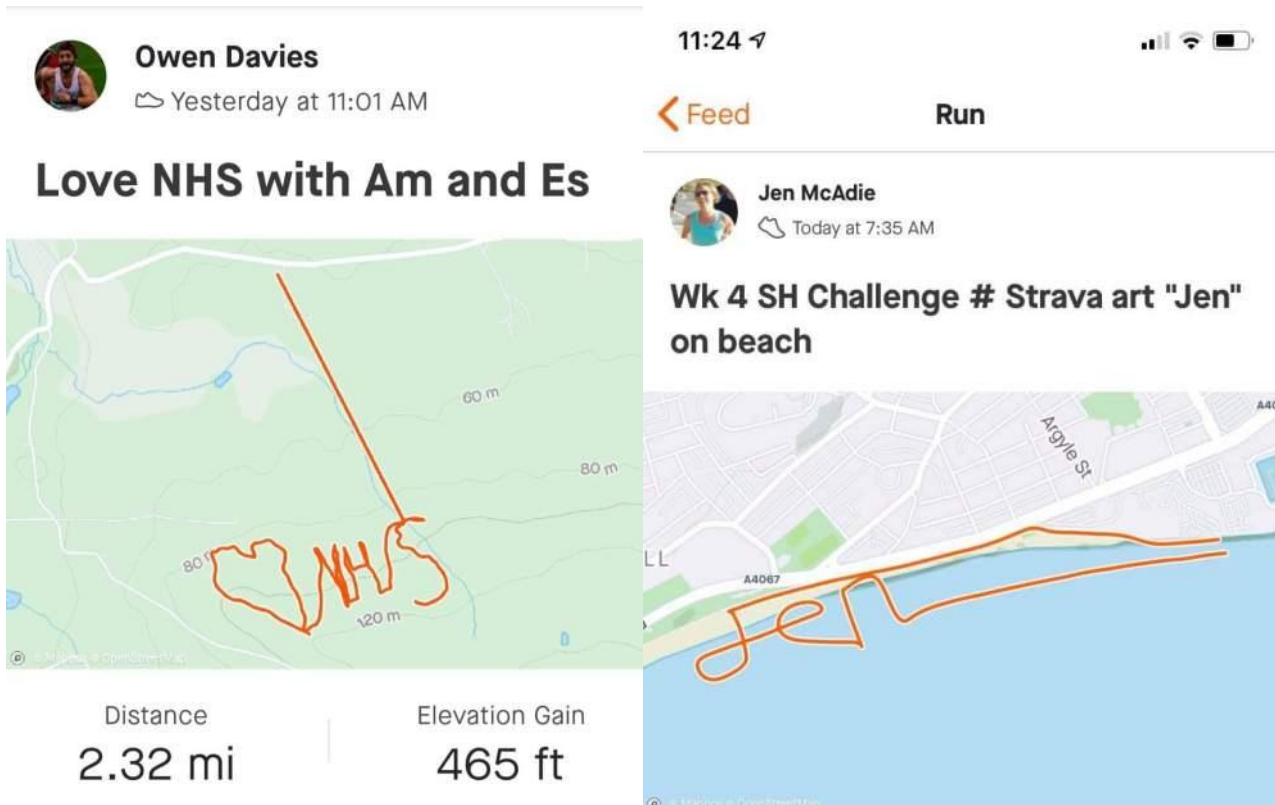
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 **Rob Falconer**  
🐾 Yesterday at 6:24 AM

**Making a big dog run.**



Distance	Avg Pace
<b>10.27 mi</b>	<b>8:19 /mi</b>
Moving Time	Elevation Gain
<b>1:25:33</b>	<b>712 ft</b>
Calories	Avg Cadence
<b>1,493 Cal</b>	<b>166 spm</b>



And so with easing of lockdown looking increasingly possible here in Wales, there will be no doubt a period of time to reflect on the successes of training in such strange times. What is clear, is that although for our group there has always been a special balance between individual effort to improve and team training, our group has beaten the negative aspects of social distancing. However, the team aspects of virtual racing are an interesting aspect that has kept us going. We had a good turnout for the Swansea Harriers Virtual 2k run last week and with any luck this will keep us all focused. And for another example, Steve Taylor stepped up himself this week to break 17 minutes for 5k – fantastic progression. On top of that, it's coaxed a few familiar faces back to the club limelight, something that we hope will continue.

If anything, at times (and I can see from the weekly leaderboards!) it has allowed us the time to train even harder or with more intensive bursts. And even in these few short weeks, our competition has morphed from the simple goal of completing 26.2 miles per week into something more sophisticated and motivational. I'm not sure we will ever desire to go back to times like these, but until racing is a possibility again, as Steve would say, let's get out there and run another marathon together!