

My Point to Point...

We have been going to the Boxing Day point-to-point as spectators for years. Usually only made bearable by hundreds of layers of clothing and the odd dram of sloe gin or some such drink in the hip flask. Riders gallop by in a flash, we all cheer and go home thinking how much we have contributed to an old forest tradition and mostly relieved to get warm again...Boxing Day 2016 was different, I was a participant!



I am not sure at what point I decided I'd like to have a go, maybe three or four years ago I muttered to anyone who was listening that I would be old enough to join the Veterans Race soon. Two major life events have occurred, firstly, the death of my mother, leaving me the responsibility of my brother who has severe learning difficulties, immersing me in the world of day care, finances and general worry and her handful of forest ponies immersing me in the world of the Commoners calendar, marking fees, drift dates and so on. The second large event

was our thatched cottage being gutted by fire in 2013. Two seemingly random events that consumed my life one way or another but crystallised with my decision to enter the Point-to-Point.

A personal challenge coupled with a desire to say thank you by trying to fundraise for two organisations that have helped me: The Minstead Trust and the Fire Fighters. Trudy Nineham and James Young helped make it happen by providing Bertie, a teensy forest pony, used in Riding for the Disabled and teaching kids to ride at their yard. Another competitor at the yard, Steph Davies, was fittening up her own pony to race the 3 mile, I tagged along twice a week for eight weeks. Up in the dark at 6.45 a.m. searching for Bertie by torchlight in the 4 acre field. Quick tack up and off we go in a rush so Steph can get back off to work for 8.45.

I have made it clear that as a happy hacking type of individual, going fast is not my cup of tea and never mind getting Bertie race fit, I need help! Walking and trotting first, then a bit of faster hill work and finally building up to the gallop. It takes me a few weeks to learn not to hold my breath. Worrying about tripping up in a rabbit hole built to a crescendo when Steph took us on a fast canter ride and it was still DARK!

Excitement and tension begins to mount with the announcement of the vicinity of the end of the race. Dogs suddenly required exercising in the unknown district of Holmsley, along with a number of other competitors all trying to look nonchalant, so many in fact that a few locals stopped to enquire why their home turf was so busy? Ah...the Boxing Day Point to Point! How the organisers keep the start of the race a secret until Christmas Day morning is fact to marvel at, but it is a painful and



necessary ingredient in the recipe of the “build up”. Speculation and getting the map out with a ruler and measuring three or one and a half miles is all part of the fun...Holmsley is a large area.

I started JustGiving fundraising pages on the internet and a paper version for neighbours – that’s when I started to find out how scared people are for me, “I’ll sponsor you *not* to do it” and “oooh you are soo brave” ...just a few of the comments. In a few weeks if I ever had a target, which I didn’t really, I had reached £500, well over what I had imagined I could raise.

What a day, privileged to be part of the unboxing and preliminaries and camaraderie at the start of the race. Then the race...rabbit holes, what rabbit holes - I want to win! Galloping up to the finish was amazing, the adrenaline and thrill feels marvellous and hearing our names shouted from the ropes an incentive to push on. Friends, family and the local community really got behind me and came to the race to cheer us on.

I did wonder when I was training in the dark and cold mornings why I was doing this. The post Point-to-Point glow explains it all...with an approximate £1,571.61 raised for charity, a satisfying “thank you”. Thank-you too to Bertie, such a cutie.

Note to self: try to get a forest pony in time for Boxing Day 2017!

Tina Campbell

