

Chester 50 Mile Ultra – 2nd March 2019

Time: 8hrs 37

Place: 17th out of 210 finishers (15th male)

Total distance according to my watch: 51 miles

This was my 3rd 50, after Round Rotherham in 2016 and Pennine Barrier in 2018. I'd managed 20th and 14th place in those, so was hoping to come in the top 20 again. But training hadn't been too good. I'd done very little in November due to injury, and I'd had two weeks totally off in January due to a nasty chest cold. My longest runs in the weeks before the race had only been 18 miles, which was way too short. So my confidence wasn't quite there this time around – I didn't have the 'bring it on' attitude I'd had at the Pennine Barrier in 2018.

Still, I felt good on the day, and had a plan: roughly 8min miling to CP4 (28 miles), dropping to roughly 9min miling average at CP5 (35 miles), and then anything around 11min miling from there on would get me a good time. This seemed pretty doable, even if painful for the last 15 miles! In previous events I'd tried to pace it, with slower miles near the beginning. This was something different: bank some good miles at pace early on, then try to hold on towards the end. Maybe it could get me a 50 mile PB. Or maybe it would hurt like hell and the wheels would come off...



Me and Simon 12 miles in – enjoying it!

It started well enough. 10 miles went by in a flash, chatting with Simon Jennings. Even at CP3 (22 miles) it felt OK. It had been great running with Simon up to here, but things weren't working out for him somehow. It seemed wrong to press ahead without Simon – his training had been phenomenal, including a 100 mile week. In fact I had told him that if I beat him he could punch me in the face (my biggest training week was a meagre 31 miles!). But what felt comfortable for me at that stage wasn't comfortable for him, and it just made sense that we split up.



Frodsham Hill War Memorial, 29 miles in – shortly before catching Martin.

I was knacked through CP4 (28 miles), but still moving well. Somehow I caught up Martin Hookway at about 30 miles. He'd had a bad patch and slowed down quite a bit. We made a good team for a lot of miles. But gradually his bad patch lifted, whereas I was just getting slower and slower, craving the next walk, or the next checkpoint. We went through CP5 (35 miles) not that far behind my target of 9min miling average, but I was getting to the point that even 11min miles were challenging. Martin was a huge support between 35 and 47 miles. These were tough miles! I had really had enough – “a whole world of pain”. But somehow Martin kept me running, even if just at 11min miles.



Me and Martin at CP5 (35 miles) – still smiling.

We were holding places 13th and 14th during this time. I was thrilled with that, and had no ambition to race. I was happy to let 5 people pass me if necessary. But I hadn't realised just how many runners were coming up behind us, not too far away. Looking back down the canal at 47 miles, they'd nearly caught us. Martin picked up the pace to hold his position, and I kept ticking over at roughly 11min miling (a huge struggle!). A couple of runners passed me, pushing me back to 16th. Then I heard Simon shouting - he had made a huge comeback! In fact, he was 8min miling, which was absolutely unthinkable for me. He flew past. No punch in the face for me – he had beaten me – but it had been a close call. We had only about two miles left when he passed me.

I stumbled on, and somehow got a bit of a lift in the final half mile, when I could smell the finish line around the corner. I was even catching somebody. The final push was fantastic. I suddenly felt good. It was weird – for at least 12 miles I'd been desperate to fall on the floor and lay still for a very, very long time. When I finally crossed the finish line I felt elated, and buzzing. I didn't fall down. I shook hands, and I beamed, loving every second. I'd come in 17th place.

So how about the strategy, overall? Had the plan worked? My PB for 50 miles was the Round Rotherham, in 8hrs 26. When I hit exactly 50 miles at Chester I checked my time, and it was exactly 8hrs 26! I couldn't quite believe it. However, there was still about a mile to go at Chester, bringing me in with a final time of 8hrs 37. Overall, the strategy worked OK, but it feels so much better to be catching people in the final 10 miles, instead of the other way around, that I might try to pace it better next time. Or maybe I just need to train properly!

Martin and Simon had come in in 13th and 15th place, so with my 17th place we'd done a cracking job as a DAC team. I was more proud of that than anything. But had we won the team prize? Well, no. Team GB Ultras had Charlie Sharpe doing a 7hr 17, and Sally Ford doing a 7hr 52, so you can't compete with that. But we claimed a comfortable second place, and we can be proud that DAC was the first team with three teammates home.



13th, 15th, and 17th – team DAC could have done no more.

Some final thoughts on the event itself. It was fantastically organised, with great attention to detail. I couldn't believe how many volunteers there were. The checkpoints were ideal. And the medal is my very best to date (and I've got a lot!). I'd really recommend this to anyone. It's not as

beautiful as the Pennine Barrier, for sure, but there are certainly beautiful sections through the Delamere Forest. This is an event I can very much recommend.

Battery on watch left at the end: more than 40%

Fuelling: two tailwinds, plenty of malt loaf and salty potatoes at the checkpoints, and some caffeinated Clif Blok Energy Chews from Martin to get me through the final 7 miles.

Longest run in the run-up: only 18 miles!

Training: Elevation gain per week in the weeks leading up to the race:

0ft (with 8 weeks to go, I got a nasty chest cold)

0ft (chest cold)

3700ft (22 mile week)

4500ft (31 mile week)

4600ft (29 mile week)

1950ft (31 mile week)

700ft (20 mile week)

Race week