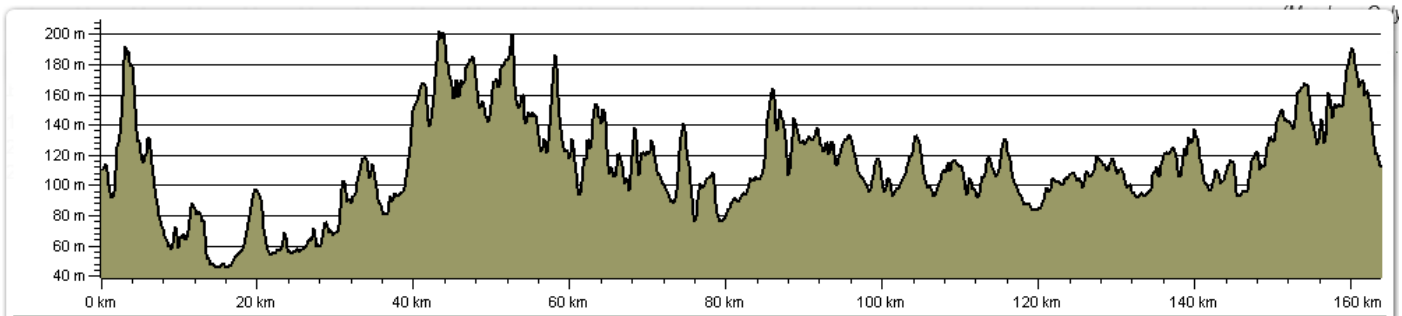


Leicestershire Round

4-5th April 2015

100 miles



Living in Leicestershire close to Bradgate Park the challenge of the Leicestershire Round has been in the back of my mind for a long time now. After a number of successful long runs last year (Runfurther Series) I decided to up my training mileage and have a crack at the Round. Easter weekend was a good time as I had the week off afterwards to recover, the weather just had to be right. Well, the weekend was forecast as dry but the preceding week had rain most days – meaning the going would be 'soft to heavy'. I decided to go for it.

I wanted to keep this as solo as possible. Unlike in the hills there are no water sources available that I know of and I did not want to carry drink and food sufficient for the whole thing so that meant stopping off at shops etc. to get supplies on route. Timing was important to make the shop opening times, so a schedule was formed. First I had to find where the shops were and then the opening times. This was done by contacting many Parish Councils around the route to identify where there were shops and then an email or phone to each shop.



Maps in wallets (double sided)

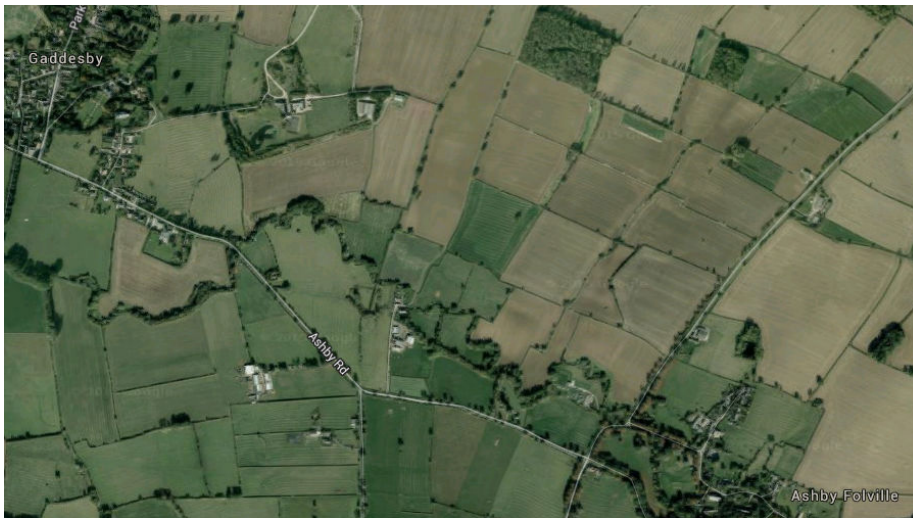


Bradgate Park

4:45am Newton Linford. [0 miles]. I'd walked the 1.5 miles from home to the start. Underway with no ceremony, no people around, just a few deer to watch me ascend up to the iconic Old John. Gear working well, enough 'light' to not need to switch a head torch on. No problems with route finding here as it is my training ground. Over to Woodhouse Eaves via a yucky descent on grass and mud through the woods, a taste of things to come. Over the fields to Swithland reservoir and a few miles of road and good track into Mountsorrel [8 miles]. Picked up 2 bottles of water at the 'Paper Shop' in quick time, and soon underway again. I was on schedule – a target of a mere 4.5 mph average for the first 8 hours. An average of 4mph or less after that was likely (and happened).

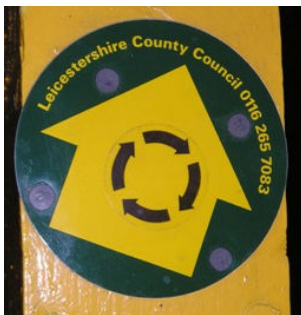
I was excited to spot three barn owls feeding around the flood plains of the river Soar. After the last week of rain I wondered if the next section by the Soar might be water logged or even flooded. Thankfully it was only wet with a few helpings of mud thrown in. This was level running but the mud patches needed diverting round or taking care though so were beginning to slow me down. I had done a recce only as far as Rearsby so after that I was on unfamiliar ground and navigation would be needed. Next it was north to Thrussington, Holby and Frisby. Some good jogging to be had here, with grass fields and good path. I was enjoying my journey. Body OK, would have liked less weight on my back, at least it was comfortable even if it my PB vest was rather stuffed.

Frisby [18 miles] was the next planned shop, opening at 8:30am, I was there at 8:40am so schedule was good. Unfortunately there were no sandwiches available (waiting deliveries) so I disappointingly settled for a Bounty bar to accompany the 2 bottles of water. One bottle to top up my supplies and the other carried. I was now carrying around 1.7L of water. Frisby was the most northern point, the route now went south and east. With a light NNW wind this meant the breeze, what there was of it, was now behind. I needed a little help with the climb out of Frisby, passed Stump Cross and 3km of fields. Young lambs and their mothers occupied the grass fields. A number of times the whole flock of sheep in a field decided to accompany me, following closely behind which was disconcerting; no problem though. The pasture gave way to arable. Now my journey slowed. With ploughed field, and sometimes no crops or only just sprouting, claggy with previous rain, the mud stuck to my shoes. Time and again I would finish crossing the field – no attempt at jogging – and lighten the load by cleaning my shoes. I'd only seen a couple of dog walkers so far on the footpaths – in 5 hours.



Many fields to cross

Gaddesby Ashby and Thorpe Satchville, places that I had not visited before, looked quiet and villagely. My maps were nearly all taken from 1:50000 which was fine on these sections. The Leicestershire Round is also clearly marked on many of the footpath posts (yellow tops) with circular arrows. I could not figure out why there was a variety of colours used, with the symbol of black round arrows on a yellow background sometimes being black and white or blue. Maybe the footpath maintainers were introducing new colours and had only updated some of the way marking posts so far? Anyway the posts and their symbols were great and most helpful and comforting. The direction arrows were generally excellent and pointing the right way to go across a field.



Signs on footpath way marker posts

On the map there looked to have been a good track up to Burrough Hill; maybe so when dried out but not now with deep ruts filled with water probably from motorbikes it was yuck. Top of the hill was grass and dry though and a great view, probably the most interesting terrain apart from Bradgate Park. Travel around the escarpment before turning generally south for 15 miles. I was pleased to arrive at Somerby where the next available shop was situated. Mistakenly I had not accurately pinpointed it on the map so went west along the main street first, then doubled back east to find it. A most helpful lady made me a sandwich – cheese and salad, which went down quickly and easily and buoyed me up. 15 minutes standing around in the shop were worth it.



Somerby shop

The LR guidance notes pointed out that when wet there are some alternative routes to take once passed Owston. I thought given the mud I'd already been through it probably would be fine to take the normal more

direct route. Owston wood were terrible. 600m of up or down mud. Thankfully Withcote Hall was much better with no deep slurry as the guidance notes had suggested, and pasture followed all the way to Launde Abbey. Not much was flat though with continued bumps to go up and down.

Launde Abbey [34 miles] was only 5 miles from Somerby, I had planned another stop here – maybe some cake. On the approach I could see there was going to be a 500m diversion to get to their café and back on the route, coupled with the fact that Launde Abbey is a peaceful 'retreat' and they may not take kindly to a muddy, scruffy, runner tramping through their buildings. So I missed it out and continued on to Belton, crossing into the county of Rutland. Immediately after Belton, once over the A47 I was back in Leicestershire and as well as on the LR also travelling on the Macmillan Way. I used a tiny section of 25:000 map to aid my route through Hallaton and then easy route following over ups and downs passed Cranoe, through Glooston, Stonton Wyville after which the Round diverts to the 147 trig point rather than taking the easier track. The villages round here do have some distinct names.

I was sending occasional texts back home to let them know I was making progress; it was good to know that others were 'with me' on the Round, at least in mind.

Over the river Welland in through the Langtons [48 miles]. Mentally the journey for me was reaching the half way point (50 miles). This was now in sight, almost. Some choices to be made. I could go on to Foxton and risk the shop (Bridge 61 café/shop) being open – it would be after 5pm that I arrived, or divert off the Round to McDonalds, or even both. I really fancied a portion of chips and this thought had kept me going for the last few hours so I diverted.



The Greenhouse Café – in there somewhere

Before McDonalds I came to the Greenhouse Café around 4:55pm so I popped in and they kindly made me a sandwich before closing at 5pm. Not sure they appreciated my muddy presence as they had already cleaned everywhere ready for closing. The tuna mayonnaise sandwich in its plastic box was packed in my sack ready for later – much later. Next stop McDonalds – except when I got there a petrol garage with shop was next to it. So I went in the shop and bought water, a few bites and a can of coke, taken out in a carrier bag. Finally to McDonalds – fast service for my chips, double salt added, and off I went navigating the busy A6 roundabout eating my chips, with my carries bag of extra goodies, quite content.

Levels fields took me to Foxton, I crossed through the village streets and up to the canal. I managed a jog along the canal banks to come out opposite the Bridge 61 café, with its 'Open' fluorescent sign. However, I had plenty of supplies on board and decided to miss it out. So over the high narrow footbridge and now travelling west into Gumley and on to Smeeton Hill. Dropping down passed Saddington reservoir, which was calm, and into Saddington itself [55 miles]. At least I was over half way and the distance remaining was getting less. 45 miles to go did still seem huge so I tried not to think about it. However the next milestone of 60 miles seemed to take ages, I was slowing I know, with far more walking than jogging. What seemed like a short distance on the map (50000) across open space did not show the field boundaries and many of these needed to be crossed to make up a km on the map.

My left leg behind the knee was getting stiff making jogging less pleasing. It was being reserved only for gentle grassy downhill.



Bridge 61 café, Foxton

Just out of Shearsby the sun set. A beautiful huge red glow – which I mistook for car rear lights. Wow! It was fantastic and I wanted to go to a house and say to someone come and look so I could share it. A few fields later the evening chill could be felt so I stopped to redress. Now with 3 shirts on plus cag, a change of socks and compression tights on top of compression shorts. Good to go again.

Onto Bruntingthorpe. There was a small garage shop here that would have provided liquid if I could have timed it right – but now it was long closed. Small streams provided navigational aids and good signage nearly everywhere meant finding the footpaths out of villages mainly no problem. Again the Leicester Round direction arrows on the way marker posts were invaluable. Peatling Magna and over to Willoughby Waterleys. 60 miles gone and time for another text to my family to let them know I was still moving. Knowing people are on the end of the phone paying attention to what you are doing does make a significant difference. Replies of encouragement and asking about my welfare were also good.



Holly Farm Fishery. Direct route no so obvious in the dark

A mile after Willoughby the path on the 50000 map goes straight through a lake. For some reason I had not noticed this when printing and marking up my maps. So in the dark with head torch I was following the path and suddenly reached a drop which went down into the lake. Oh! I was actually a few metres south of the actual path, since there are actually two lakes that make up the fishery, and slightly north would have found the gap between the lakes. Instead I walked clockwise round the lake until I eventually found the way forward.

I was feeling quite tired and when the opportunity arose I had a quick lie down and instant doze on a mini wooden footbridge over a ditch. Perhaps 5-10 minutes. I came back to wakedness suddenly, got up and felt much better. Well aware that in the past when this has happened to me I have got more and more sleepy so signs were not good.- I'd only been going for around 22 hours.

Traffic noise grew louder as the M1 approached, was crossed, and then gradually faded away in the still evening. The night light was good and possible to switch off torch at times. Otherwise the focus was entirely on the ground without being able to take in the surrounds. I'd texted back home that I was slowing – so they knew that I knew that I was dropping behind anything like a 4 mph schedule. Frequently at night

there would be a loud flapping in a tree above me as a pigeon was roused – by my light or sound – and made its getaway. For some reason this was annoying me; I wanted the pigeons to be quiet and settled.

After the most southerly point of the route at Claybrooke Magna [69 miles] it was track for a few km then Fosse Meadow woods and Sharnford. There was thankfully much less of up and down in this part of the round, although a 10m or 20m climb was seeming significant. After Aston Flamville the milestone of 75 miles gone and 25 to go. I was also close to Burbage. My plan A had been to detour into Burbage to the pizza shop as it was open until midnight. I'd missed it by some hours so on the positive side at least I avoided an extra mile detour. A minor route change took me over the M69 then back on track to zigzag round the NE side of Burbage and skirt round the west of Burbage wood.



I tucked in to my tuna sandwich that I carried since near Foxton 25 miles ago and enjoyed it.

Dawn and daylight were now with me so head torch stashed away and able to take in the scenery. This was the built up areas making up the outskirts of Barwell – through an industrial area in contrast to all those fields. Back to footpaths now for 3 miles and a little section along the Ashby canal – gentle level was a pleasant change. Plenty of cars parked at Sutton Wharf, no people around though as I made my way quietly passed. I sat at one of the picnic tables and adjusted my luggage and disposed of rubbish. Then onward through the wood and skirting the Bosworth visitor centre. I passed the occasional old sign saying the path would be closed on 22 March due to a Richard III event. Some medieval tents with occupants were at the visitor centre, no one was stirring through. On leaving Sutton the map footpath does more zigzagging before making a beeline to Market Bosworth. An early morning mist had settled and I descended into it for half an hour of chill until Market Bosworth [85 miles] was reached.

Now 86 miles gone. Average speed 3.3 mph. Plan A was to have been finished by now! However, determined to finish I was plodding on. Still, there was the opportunity to visit the Bosworth Coop – except I was slightly too early by 15 mins, so I missed it out. Down the Back Lane and on to Carlton. My blister between big and second toe had developed a different pain level. I needed to give it some attention. So when I reached a stile I sat and investigated. My shoes were muddy, my socks thick with mud. Shoe and sock off, so hands got muddy – and now I needed to get a plaster or something onto the burst blister. My blister plaster would not stick so I used two normal plaster around the area – if nothing else they would provide a bit of cushioning between the toes to reduce further rubbing. Gear back on and set off gingerly.

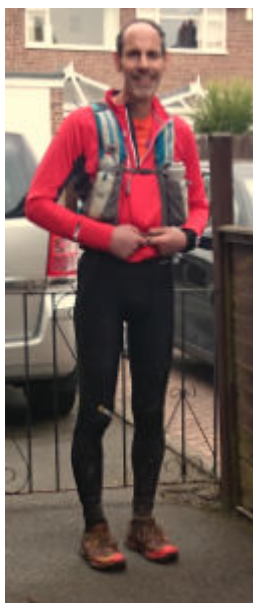
Shackerstone and then I could turn east and head for home. An awful track took me to Odstone, ruts of mud to negotiate; 90 miles gone. Down and up to Nailstone. Feeling really slow now. A few dog walkers were travelling the same speed as me! Thornton could not come quickly enough as then I could dispense with maps and follow my nose home. So I reached Thornton [96 miles] after a climb up from the railway and then got disorientated on the 'Main' road before working out which way to head to get to the reservoir end. Shops were available; I continued with what resources I had – still enough drink – and oh, that can of coke had not been consumed – what a waste of effort carrying it.

Yet more up down up down through woods, mud, under the M1, through Markfield and then John's Lee Wood. So slow now, the last field, the last gate, the last section of road into busy sunny Newton Linford. I

was still moving in a straight line, and half a mile later that was it. Done. Strange really, no one around knew and I quite wanted someone to speak to me so I could tell them I had just completed 100 miles. It was midday.

My final challenge now was to walk the 1.5 miles home. This was a simple road section which I allowed myself to go along really slowly. I stopped briefly to text everyone and suddenly felt the emotion of the achievement. The warmth of the sun on me and I felt nauseous so diverted away from the public off the road to a footpath across fields – yet another footpath. I did know this one well and was glad to be away from the road and people as I conscientiously picked my way step by step closer and closer to home. Then I was home. 31h 23 mins.

The family were expecting me and came and took a few phone photos. Bed beckoned. First wash and sort out blister which would need cleaning. My legs were so stiff I could not bend, so bath rather than shower. Katherine then helped out with the blister – except it looked like dirt had gone under the skin and needed better attention than she could give. Sunday, no health centre available, so off we went to Leicester Royal Urgent Care Centre after I'd had an hour dozing. We were greeted by a busy crowded warm stuffy waiting room and a 4 hour wait. Oh boy. In the end I got seen and cleaned up within an hour, home and then bed. Zzzzonk.



At home, finished!



Feet finished too

Kit list

14 pages of maps in plastic wallets, mainly 1:50000

Drink:

Water, a few 'High 5' electrolyte tablets. Can of coke carried half the round and not used (derrr)

Food:

Banana loaf 2/3, 2 tea cakes, sandwiches – cheese salad, tuna mayonnaise, Cliff Bar – blueberry, apple & cinnamon bar, jelly sweets, digestive chocolate, Bounty, mini cheddars, Breadcrumb Pork balls with mayonnaise stuffing, cherry muffin – dry, McDonalds salted chips

Wearing:

Hele, Inov8 top, Raid Light top, Skins 400 compression shorts, Skins 400 compression tights, 2 pairs Drymax trail socks, Compass Sport calf compression, 2 pairs gloves and silk gloves, buff, beanie hat, cag and trousers, Ultimate Direction PB vest (stuffed full). Brookes Cascadia 9 shoes.

Also:

Head torch, spare batteries (not needed), bits of first aid, compass, phone, money,

Credits for photos in this report

Various screen images taken from around the internet and my folks when I got home.

Mileage

31h 23min; 3.18 mph

All mileages are quoted after measuring on MapMyRun. The actual Round may be 101 or 102 miles or more. I did an extra 1.5 miles from home to the start and again from the finish to home, i.e. 103+ in total.

Actual time	Elapsed	Distance	Average
		miles	mph
04:45	0	0	
07:21	02:36	12	4.6
08:40	03:55	18	4.5
11:30	06:45	28	4.1
13:16	08:31	36	4.2
17:00	12:15	49	4.0
17:58	13:13	51	3.8
20:59	16:14	60	3.6
80 in 24 hr			3.3
00:03	20:18	70	3.4
06:45	26:00	86	3.3
07:21	26:36	87	3.2
08:31	27:46	90	3.2
11:31	30:46	98	3.1
12:08	31:23	100	3.18

Nigel Aston