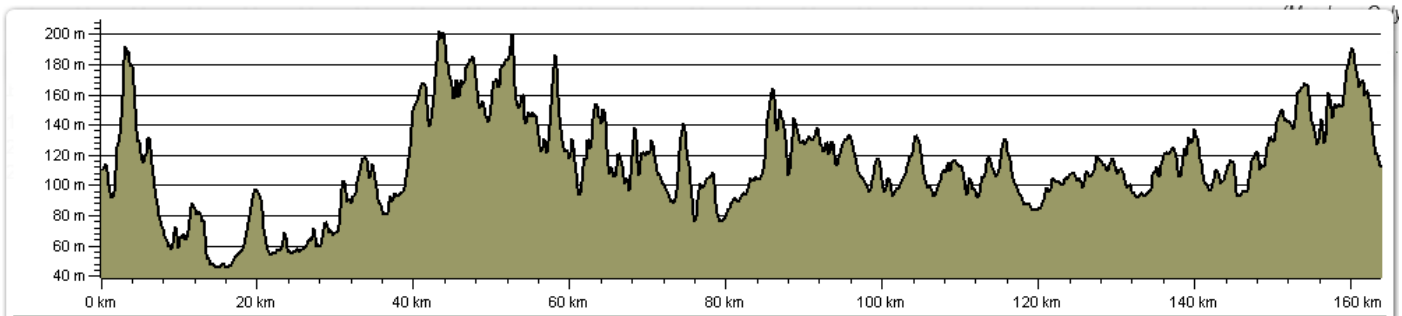


Leicestershire Round (Ultra!)

3-4th June 2016

100 miles



Bed at 7:30pm, up at 12 midnight, some cereal to eat, liberal doses of anti-chafing cream on my feet and am ready to go. Katherine drove me to Newton Linford so I could get going on the route quicker rather than walking the 1.5m to the 'start' as I did last year. The coolness of the night caused me to wear an extra layer (short and long sleeve tops) plus gloves as I set off around 00:45am. A gentle walk to get the body going and then a bit of jogging before the first 'hill' of the round going up to Old John in Bradgate Park. Out of the park and near the exit I meet Katherine who has driven round to wish me on my way. 2m done, 98m to go.



Bradgate Park

The weather is good, around 8C, dry, light breeze. As usual with any event the weather has its part to play. I started watching the long distance forecasts with a week to go. Early June looked reasonable and then potentially becoming unsettled. For this Round it needed to be dry for a few days beforehand to dry out the ground/vegetation and then remain dry during too. Last year my attempt was in early April after it had been wet for a week. Although no rain during the Round the ground was still muddy and the grass wet which made it both hard going across claggy fields and continual wet feet leading to an enormous blister. I did get round – in 31h. This year a colleague at work was keen to help support so I enlisted his help for an informal checkpoint at 77 miles – which would avoid another deviation to visit a shop to pick up supplies.

The Leicestershire Round is a 100 mile circuit of Leicestershire, brought about by the local LDWA to celebrate their centenary and was an official 'Round' after the final section was published in 1983.

I chose Friday as the start for the Round as that left me with the weekend to recover. With a few days to go Cumbria was warm and dry and Leicestershire not so. I considered switching the Leicestershire Round for the Bob Graham Round. Delusions maybe. I had been super-inspired by Nicky Spink's BRGx2 in May; brilliant, and as I have made many solo forays around all or parts of the BGR it was a possibility. With one day to go the weather window was available – Friday dull, no sun, dry; Saturday fog, then sun (probably too warm) so Leicestershire Round was go. It also has the huge plus that there is no four or five hour drive to get to the start and same for home again, just more or less out the back door and off we go.

So I was underway early Friday morning. Enjoying the peace and calmness of the pre-dusk, although contenting with the metronomic swish swish of water in water bottles. No need for maps on territory close to home so I could just concentrate on the ground. I popped out the side of Woodhouse Eaves into a freshly ploughed and sifted field over which there is normally a well-defined footpath. It had gone. I casually guessed the line, based on feelings and oops badly misjudged it, ending up in the wrong part of the field and a deviation of 0.5km.



Dots show the actual way, blue is my horrible miss judgement

When a mile later, another field with non-distinct markings was to be crossed I made more use of whatever outline there was of hedges and trees to get the right line. Now it was track and road, easy to follow. On the ascent away from Swithland Reservoir I tucked into my first cling film wrapped boiled egg but I miss coordinated eating and walking so started to choke. A minor panic - feeling like I had half a boiled egg lodged in my lungs. Lots of coughing eventually saw me OK, although the few houses at the top of the hill may have wondered what all the coughing was about outside at 3am. It is also possible that I ate some cling film with the egg! So road and good track took me into Mountsorrel where this year the stop at the shop was not required as I was carrying more fluid and food. My rucksack (Ultimate Direction Vest sack) had 1L of water on board and 2x600ml bottles on the front, coupled with spare kit, food for some of the journey and eight double pages of maps and phone.

The dog leg to get under the A6 is much better than trying to cut through the undergrowth and then its pleasant fields over, and then by, the river Soar to Cossington, then track to Ratcliffe College. I know of two people who have completed the Round in one go, Jerry Wilkes in August 2013 and another chap who I had met along this track coincidentally last year sometime. There does not appear to be any official record keeping by the LDWA of completions – although they will supply a badge if you say that you have done it either in one go or over many weeks or longer (small sections, one at a time). Maybe I should keep a (small) record for future attempts by people.

The crossing of the dual carriage way was straightforward. I wonder if the LDWA had the Round as their official '100' one year what they would do about such a potentially dangerous crossing. I suppose they could start at the college and get the police to stop traffic for 10 mins whilst everybody crossed. Easy going to Rearsby, and here I paid close attention to the route to go round the back of the church on footpaths through the houses to avoid either going wrongly directly through the Convent or equally wrongly to the North and crossing fences. I eat one of my sandwiches – cheese and coleslaw – on soft white bread which goes down well. Gentle paths of sheep eaten grass all the way through quiet Holby and along to Frisby, mile 18. Along this section I pass some gorgeous pink flowers – possibly orchids - growing wild in the middle of a field. Frisby was another place that I had stopped at last year for a shop and supplies, but no need this year as my 2.2L of fluid was going to last me through to Somerby at mile 29.

The head torch was now stuffed into my rucksack which began to split at the seams. As the Round went on and the split got bigger I was having doubts that it would hold together. Pity because it has been a great item for me with its many pockets and easy access drinks. I may have to get another one the same – not cheap though.



Ultimate Direction PB Vest falling apart at the seams

A few more miles over crop fields to Gaddesby, no problems, the farmers have kindly created a clear path through some of the higher crops which is easy to jog along on the hard soil. 6am at Gaddesby where I meet my first person, a lady dog walking who picks up her dog and carries it as I go past. Was she protecting me from the dog or vice versa? More short grass sheep fields and the occasional cow field where the cows are really still dozy and not doing much. The sheep with lambs clear out the way and unfortunately the whole field of sheep sometimes join in running around which is rather unnecessary and I feel a bit guilty disturbing the whole flock.



A considerate farmer has cleared a path

I had set up Followmee on my phone. This is a GPS tracking facility, costing about £3 one-off. It worked really well sending a signal which could be picked up on a website. I told family and friends and so they were able to know where I was and whether I was still moving – or at least whether the phone was still moving. At 6am in the morning there was no feedback from anyone yet. A road section out of Thorpe Satchville (mile 25) and then track up to Burrough on the Hill. Good to get up high and see the expanse of Leicestershire – we're talking about 210m here. Through the woods and then turn right which is South. This is the first 'corner' of the Round and my first stop was coming into site – the church tower of Somerby at 29 miles.

I knew where the shop was this year having turned East rather than West last year so headed directly for the shop and pleased to find it empty so I got served immediately by 'Angela Clark' (she gave me her card). It is now called 'Little Shop of Loveliness'. I buy another sandwich – egg mayonnaise, banana, small choc bar, crisps all to take out and a can of coke I drink in the shop sitting down (drinking fizzy coke quick is not easy). Angela was very interested in my endeavour and said it would give her something to talk about for the rest of the day – to her clients presumably. A great stop. I ate the crisps and sandwich on leaving the shop as I walked South to Owston. I was feeling generally OK, nothing but normal tiredness and a little soreness in places – feet and quads. My pace was a steady 4 mph, which I had planned for and then after 8h to slow to 3.5 mph. So far so good.



Somerby shop, recently renamed to 'Little Shop of Loveliness'

Owston Woods last year were terrible. Muddy and boggy with no alternative once in the woods but to get caked in mud. However, the Round does allow a 'wet' alternative on a slightly longer diversion around the woods on a minor road so I took that. It worked out fine, although cars were travelling fast on the still minor road past Withcote Hall which I suddenly had to get used to after so much quiet. Up and over a hillock of longish grass then descend down into the tranquil Launde Abbey area. Fields and streams before joining a long long track that sapped out some energy as I plodded along up a gradual incline for 1km. At the top I was rewarded with an exchange for a 0.5km descent. A woman on horseback waited for me to pass saying that I would be quicker than her downhill – unlikely I thought given my plodding. But she did not come past or join me on the minor road to the back of Belton (35m).

Coming out of Belton downhill I pass two lady joggers walking. They comment that they bet I have run further than them today. How right they were. When I tell them 35 miles and say I am doing a 100 they are gobsmacked and speechless. It is an encouraging reaction for me. Eventually they rustle up shouts of "Good Luck. Keep going".

Allextton has one of the many churches on the Round. Every village has at least one of varying sorts. There is even one that has been converted into a house. They act as useful long range navigation points and inspirations. Some good jogging now through crop fields with good paths and grass not too long. Surprisingly I meet a retired colleague from work who looks remarkably well out walking his dog (Danny Mansfield). I chat briefly, then he does a good turn by holding a gate open for me. Moments like that which given me a boost as I think of it and not of sore feet and bruised quads. It lasts for a good few miles. Hollarton is reached (40m) at an av speed of 4.1mph. I'm content with that, using my watch to time 4m segments (looking for around 1h per segment). As the journey continues it gets more difficult to work out when a 4m segment has passed in terms of mileage divided equally by 4 – because my brain is tiring.

The occasional field is now presenting problems. The grass is long – ready for silage – and I don't jog to avoid tripping up as my leg lift has reduced and it is better to conserve energy. Worse though is the oilseed

rape fields. These are horrible. The plants are at their highest – head high, and where there was once a path the giants lean over, one side leaning to the right and the other to the left completely obscuring the path. Passage is only at walking pace and then at some cost, using arms to pull my way through and bare thighs batter through the plants getting gradually more grazed. The Salomon compression shins are handiest for the lower level growth. Thankfully the vegetation is dry so at the end of the field I emerge with a dusting of yellow flowers and a few scrapes rather than a complete cold soaking.

In the early morning the cows have been lying down in fields. As the morning has progressed and midday has passed the cows take more interest in me. Now on entering a field of cows they all look up and immediately one or two or maybe more will approach me. As I walk through the field a few more might join in with some jogging towards my back. This is most disconcerting. I surprise myself with the loudness of my “yaa yaa” and waving of arms. It does the trick and the cows stop; even turn away. I start walking again and they resume their trot behind my back towards me. The exercise is repeated until I can escape. With a faster heartbeat my pace quickens for a while and I hope that does not happen again. But it does. I count the number of fields where it happens, two, three, four, ...



I wish all cows were as docile as this

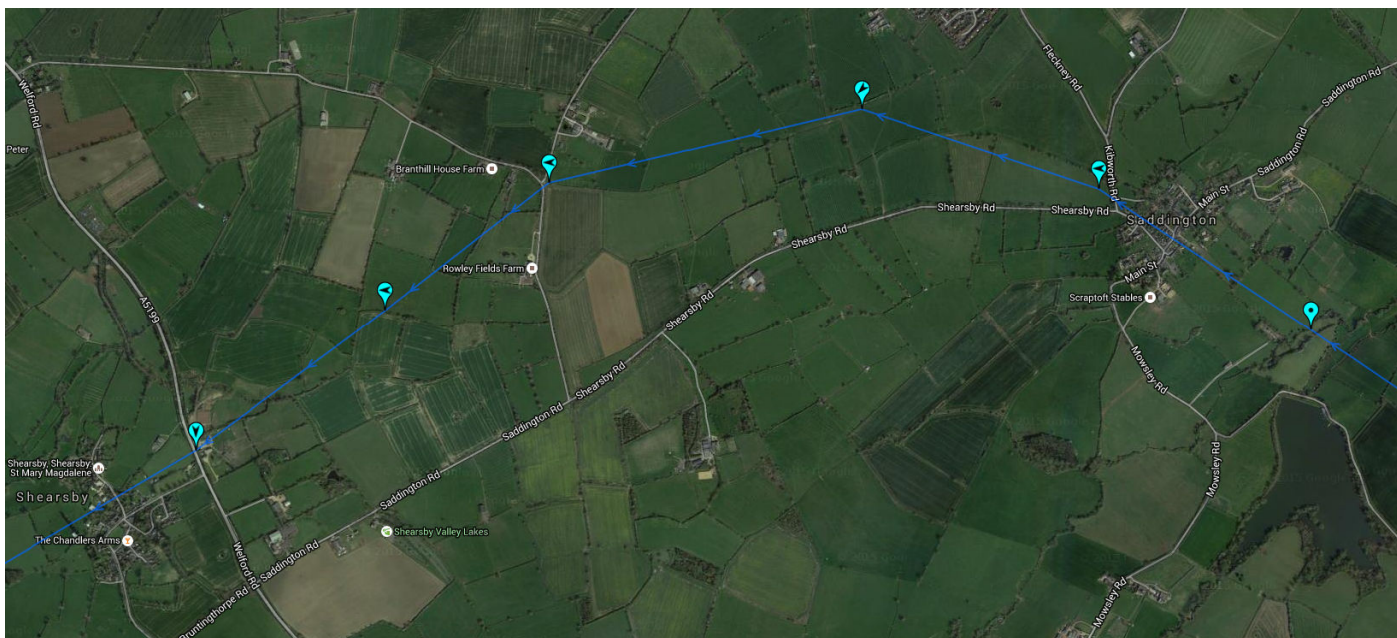
Stonton Wyville (splendid village name) is left behind on a steep ascent up to trig point 147m representing a climb of over 50 metres! The Langtons come and go. This is the second corner of the Round as it turns West. My thoughts now turn to a food stop. I bade good bye to yet another flock of sheep and make a minor deviation from the Round (not a short cut) to drop in at McDonalds.

I recall Dean Karnazes recounting in his book when doing a 135m run in America that he phoned ahead to a Pizza house and collected Pizza and drinks which he then ate whilst continuing to move. McDonalds also offers a useful toilet stop – and hand wash. For food I opted for large fries and a hot chocolate. This was planned, although the drink was up for debate until I decided close to the stop. I considered that milkshake would be too cold (I had that last year), coke too fizzy and maybe hot chocolate likely to give me more energy. So I sat at a table, added 3 sugars to the drink and 2 salts to the chips, nearly mixing up sugars and salts. I left my food on the table and put the tray away like a good boy only to find a cleaner nearly taking away my food from the table. I picked it up, left, eating on the move. This was not easy. Reading the map, hot cup of drink and bag of fries. Eventually I'd stuffed down the fries and put the cardboard box down my short where I also stored the map. This meant I could remove the cap from the drink to let it cool enough to eventually slurp it down. The cup was then squashed with the lid inside and fastened in the compression strapping on the back of my rucksack – no dropping rubbish now.



Plenty to keep my interest as Foxton was only a mile away. Through the houses, along the canal for 1km and a diversion over the bridge to visit the shop. This was a stock up point. 1.5L of water and crisps: there did not seem much else to go for here and I decided I probably still had enough on board to get me to Neil in 26 miles. So I sat at the table outside the shop next to the canal basin, ate my crisps and filled the 2x600ml bottles, added one zero tablet per bottle again and drank most of the rest of the water. I was still carrying about 400ml in the sack. A sort of friendly inquisitive smile from a lady sat nearby as I set off again having boosted my salt levels with chips and crisps. 51m and over half way, 1:30pm.

Getting a little warmer but thankfully no sun poking through with the covering of clouds doing a great job; just what I would have ordered. Gumley, round past St Helen's church then soon a field of cows to fend off. Another quiet section, with views over Saddington reservoir on my left then through Saddington itself. Saddington also has a St Helens church.



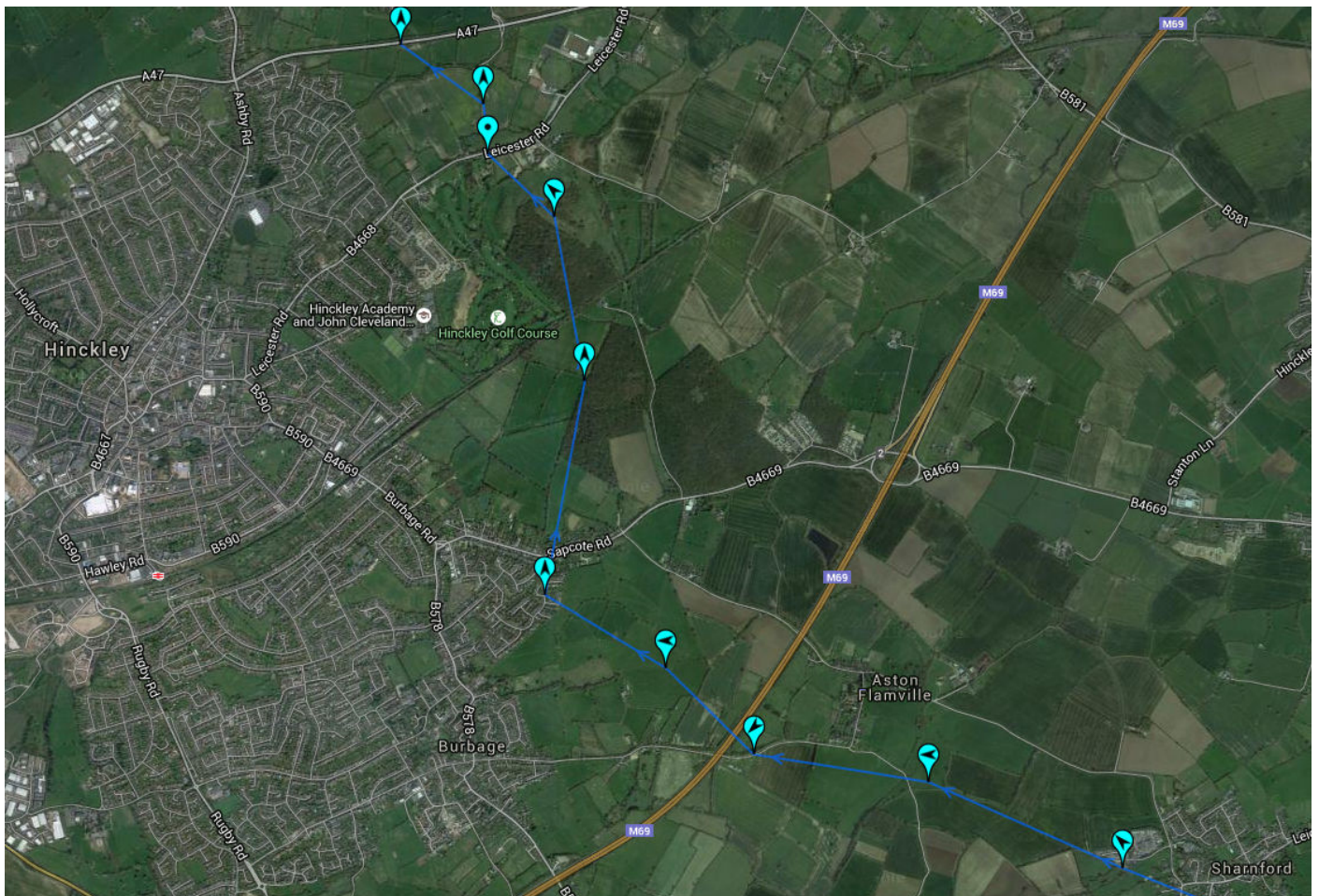
I ate my remaining sandwich and was pleased to still be able to eat sensible food. Then on into Bruntingthorpe which I had down as a possible top up point – at the garage (cars and servicing rather than petrol). I was not in desperate need of anything but I thought I'd stroll through the forecourt to see what their 'shop' had to offer. The 'shop' was not really there, and if it was I may have to wait some time to be attended to. So I passed through and back into the fields after the last house. Peatling Magna followed by Willoughby Waterleys. Beginning to slow now after 14h with my speed probably averaging 3.5 mph. Still jogging sections but also letting the higher crops bring me to a walk. Starting to lose my appetite now but

trying to keep up the energy with snippets of food like KMC, a square of chocolate and finishing off some cheese biscuits which had become crumbs; washing these down with my zero tablet water.

A small section of the route was now coming up that last year I had tackled in the dark and gone round in circles. The route and path passes between two fishing lakes. All I needed to do was walk between the lakes and very obvious in day light meet the style in the hedge boundary and go over it. Easy. Latest year I'd missed the style and ended up going round the lake looking for an exit somewhere before eventually locating it in the hedge. One example of how the increased day light of the summer months can really help with improving your average speed and reducing night time tiring frustrations.

The minor roads were now giving way to major ones, B and A roads, M1 which had to be crossed over or under making things interesting and varied. At Dunton Bassett I had gone 64m so a beep on the watch to record another 4m section. I was also doing a few leg stretches – squats - at each 4m point – when I remembered. At first 3 squats had been no problem. Now 3 squats showed how stiff I had become. I increased the squats to four and sometimes five to maintain some fluidity. Minor road of 1km took me through Leire with its Roman antiquity. Another 1km of road through Frolesworth to take me past 2/3rd of the way. The route continued with perhaps one mile separating villages giving me fields then village centres then fields so plenty of variety. The fields with crops were sometimes hard going and other times when short pleasantly cushioning for the feet. The roads being the opposite, easy going but accentuating the soreness and hot spots on the soles of my feet.

I changed sock on my left foot and rubbed in a good dose of Lanacane cream. My feet were hot – at least they were dry. I tightened my shoes. I loosened my shoes. I stretched my feet by walking on one side of the foot and then on the other. I jogged on my toes. It all sort of helped. From the Venonis Roman settlement it was track for 2km. No excuse really I had to jog and did. The bottom left corner of the Round was now behind me.



The route passes by the outskirts of Hinckley

Sharnford, past Aston Flamville and I think I should attend to a possible blister on my left foot. There is some short grass by the road so I am about to sit down when I notice a chap nearby. So rather than attract

questions and perhaps sympathy I carry on. Hang on, he's taking a photo of me. Then I realise that it's Neil. He has intercepted me earlier on along the route which is a pleasant surprise. A chance for a quick drink and we agree to meeting in the pre-arranged point North of Burbage woods. He explains that the tracker takes a while to update on the web site so when the tracker had updated at the previous village of Sharnford where he was waiting I'd already gone through. It does motivate me to think that others are watching my progress throughout the whole day and part of the night on the tracker. I had received text messages from the family confirming locations and approximate speeds as they saw updates coming in. Certainly when you see the whole track appearing (at end of this report) it does show off the Round well.



Snapped, 19h, 74m

Burnage common was so much easier in the daylight and I was able to accurately locate the escape route over the golf course – rather than last year when I had ended up in the car park slightly off route at around 3am. Neil was waiting plus food and drink and I enjoyed a few minutes (five?) of sitting down. It was 8:30pm. Without being asked he'd brought along a great selection of items – sandwiches, malt loaf, banana, sweets, jaffas, gels, water, and at my request flat coke. Rice pud was best and easily slipped down. I ate some bits and drank as much coke as I could. Water bottles topped up – for the last time – and zero tablets (lime) added. Get up, oh that is stiff. And get going again. I could now skirt to the West of Barwell following the Route and avoid a diversion into Barwell centre to a shop to stock up. 80m done and a text sent to various family members (I sent one every 20m and read any texts that had come in – which were all encouraging).

Back to longer sections of fields now until the canal is reached. Walk/jog past the barge owners settling down with their TVs for the evening. Not much action at Sutton Wharf so into the dark woods and up to the closed visitor centre then out over what seemed like a long long set of fields to reach the road and then Sutton Cheney. I don't really know why it felt long (3/4 km) so I must have been tiring and slowing. Head torch now in action. Behind Sutton Cheney was a long field section of 2km. The crops were not much hindrance just my body, unable to do much jogging even on the gentle down. Outskirts of Market Bosworth, only 15m to go and it felt like I was nearly home. That was probably because home was only 11m away and I was going on a circular longer route.

Which way should I go through the village centre. I choose to go anti-clockwise past the wicker horse, past the Spar and down Back Lane. I got confused between white road and yellow road on my 1:50000 map extract and stopped to study the map wondering where the footpath was. A woman was running down a back alley and coming towards me – bit silly I thought since there was a gate causing a dead end. Then I realised with some surprise it was my daughter. My wife Katherine and daughter Helen had driven out on spec to try and locate me, using the tracker as guidance. They were not to know my exact route through Mkt Bosworth, had spotted me disappearing down Back Lane, parked the car instantly jumped out and

managed to catch me before I'd gone. What luck. A few hugs and well-wishers, goodbyes and off again into the night, this time with a buzz for me.

Fields to Carlton then fields to Shackerstone. Crops in these fields were now large – long grass, or worse rape seed plants really making it hard work. No jogging, even walking pace had slowed. Outside Barton in the Beans I recalled last year when my blistered foot had been so painful I had to stop and sit on a style and try and mend the foot. This year I just carried on and managed a jog down the gentle slope this time through a cleared pathway in the crops. At 88 miles it was another 4m section done and a few more squats to keep lose. A diversion is in place here because of a footpath on the closed bridge. I overshoot and have to come back to find the start of the path and then stomp through interminable high grassy crops to find my way over a stream ditch and then spot height 118 and finally into Odstone. What a relief to get on a road for a few hundred metres. I beep my watch at the end of another 4m section and think that my last hour time has been good. Then I realise in my daze that the last 4m section was only a 2m section – derrr!.

Surely I'll be on familiar ground soon. But not so. Grass and crops in the dark as I approach Nailstone. This time a new crop hazard. I expect the path to cross the field and into Nailstone. Maybe it does but this is a field of potatoes planted really well in ridges. The ridges are running across my path and so I would have to go up and down a huge number of these ditches and ridges to get to my destination. I try long striding from top of ridge to top of ridge. Exhausting. I give in and instead follow the line of least resistance going along a ditch and pop out at the edge of the minor road W of Nailstone.



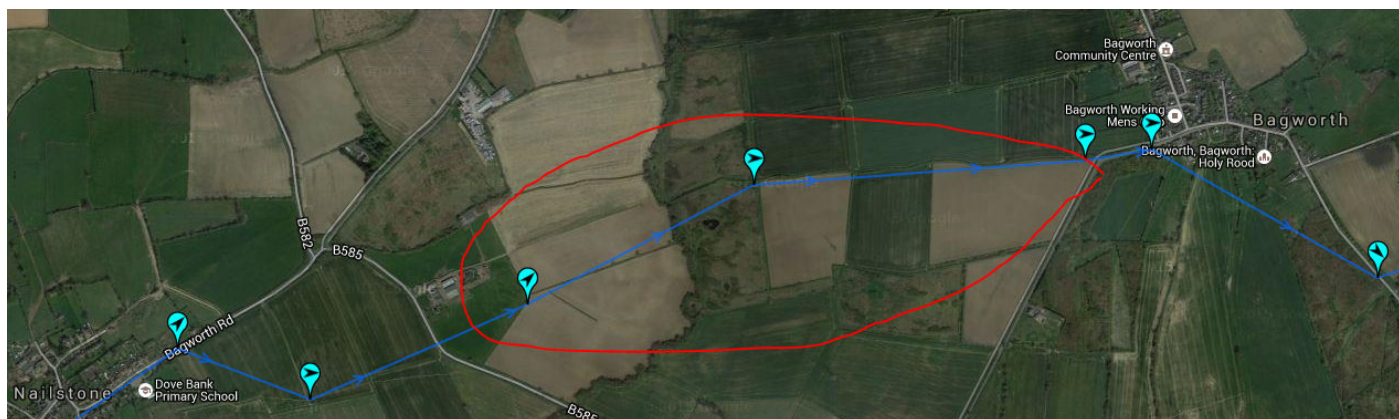
Typical Potato field

I don't cross the road as I feel queasy. I sit on a huge concrete slab. I still feel queasy. I half lie on the slab. It is not comfortable. This is a bad spell. I try to be sick. I am not. I walk across the road. Yuk. I sit on the pavement with legs in the road. Its 1:15am. Nearly dozing off a car comes and I spring up, sort of, as I don't want the car running over my legs or stopping to ask if I am OK.



Approaching Nailstone over potato field. Red = theory, green = actual.

I search for the path in Nailstone carefully following my 1:50000 map section. I overshoot and have to come back. Not good. I check my map again and realise stupidly that I also printed this section in 1:25000 which would have shown me accurately what to do. Potato field was bad; this next section is the worse of the Round. It is 1:40am, quite dark and I plunge into head height oilseed rape. All I see is trifid like plants reflecting my head torch and have to imagine a path exists because it is not visible. I swim through, slowly slowly making progress with no end in sight only leaves and yellow flowers. Again I am thankful it is dry. Each breast stroke saps the energy. And then a boundary – am I out the water? No it is a stile which drops me back in at the deep end again. How much longer? I try not to get angry as that would deplete my levels quicker. Eventually I surface. Its road. Its Bagworth and 94m.



Nailstone to Bagworth swimming through fields of giant Rape seed flowing over the path.

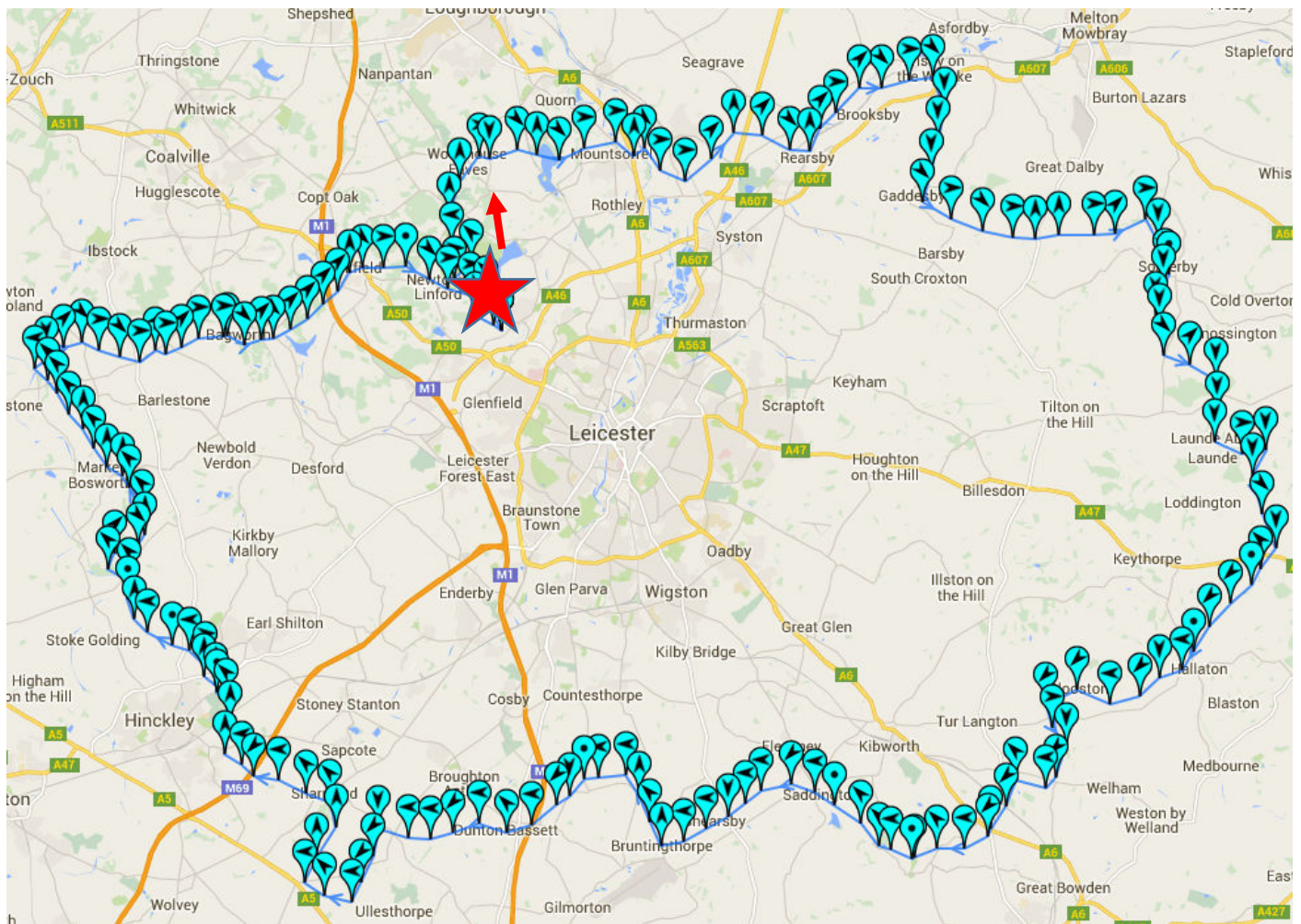


Oilseed rape closing over the path

There is no more rape seed ahead – I hope. Glorious road and then down and up into Thornton. Now this is home territory. It is the last page of maps and they can now be put away. The quads complain on the downs. No need to overdo it though. A plod out of Thornton and a few more down and ups reminding me that I am back on the hillier part of the Round. 96m gone, 4m to go. My eating and drinking is almost none now, with just a few sips occasionally. I do take on one gel and a few nibbles of KMC. It's enough. Markfield centre at 3:30am – nothing about, closed shops, closed curtains. A messy bit of route along the dual carriage way and now a few fast cars whizz by. I can turn off from the road and head round to John's Lee wood. I am excited – the end is close. A little, tiny, jogette on the down slope through the woods on the hard muddy path. Avoid the close attentions of a huge horse at the farm, though the last section of woods and into the last field.

It is light and, oh no! the last field and the cows are ready for me yet again. In nine fields on the Round cows have come after me. How would anyone who's afraid of cows ever manage this round? Perhaps winter when the livestock are tucked up in their barn beds. The cows are slow; they have not really got going. As I pass them adrenalin kicks in and I jog to the exit gate – where did that jog come from? I surprise myself. So now the simple pavement by the side of the road into Newton Linford is all I need to complete. No cheering crowds, in fact no one. Eventually I reach the litter bin that marked the start at the park entrance and now marks the finish. My fast (?) walking pace grinds to a crawl as I inwardly celebrate. It's 4:30am.

I decide to walk the last part of the route home across the fields to cushion my feet which feel very sore. I am slow now. It is a real effort with the Round done to keep motivated to keep moving. Home eventually. Glass of milk, a quite shower and crawl into bed without waking anyone. Zonked.



'Followme' tracking in action. It was 10 minutes between each tracking point.

Kit list

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

Drink:

1L water and 2x600ml bottles. Zero tablet (lime) added to all water carried and acquired.

Food:

2 slices white bread shredded cheddar and coleslaw; 2 slices white bread cheese and bacon filling, 2 boiled eggs (wrapped in cling film), 2 medium bars white KMC (one eaten), 6 gels (3 eaten), 2 fudge (not eaten), cheddars (not eaten), handful of small cheddar biscuit shapes (all eaten), 8 small squares of millionaire shortbreads, 2 small McVities Digestive wrapper chocolate biscuit bar (one eaten).

Wearing:

T-shirt (from 2014 Round Rotherham) and Raid light long sleeved top, A400 compression shorts, Salomon compression shins (very comfortable and helped going through crops), Drymax trail socks, Brookes Cascadia 10 shoes, small gloves, head torch, compass. Ultimate Direction PB vest (over stuffed since seems split/ripped).

Also:

Spare pair Drymax socks, cap, buff, long sleeve heile, waterproof cag + trousers, bits of first aid including blister plasters, compass, phone with tracker (signal all the way round judging by tracker output), money.

Somerby Shop [29m]

2 slices of white bread with egg mayonnaise, can of coke, salt & vinegar crisps, small bar of chocolate (ate half). 2x600ml water bottles filled.

Mkt Harborough McDonalds [49m]

Large fries + 2 packets of salt
Hot chocolate + 3 packets of sugar.

Foxton Bridge 61 shop [51m]

1.5L bottle of water to fill up 2x600ml bottles

Crisps

Neil brief stop near Aston Flamville [75m]

Swig of water.

Neil stop, Burnage common exit [77m]

Rice pud pot, Banana, 1 slice white bread jam sandwich, 8 Jaffa cakes, 2x600ml water bottles filled.

Credits for photos in this report

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

Round info

100 miles

1300m of ascent (or more)

27:49 (average of 3.6 mph)

Record of continuous completions that I know of

Jerry Wilkes 12-13 July 2013, 22:41

Anon 2014?

Nigel Aston 4-5 April 2015, 31:23

Nigel Aston 3-4 June 2016, 27:49

Nigel Aston