



## Tips and experiences of three participants in the Race to the Stones

To help prepare for the Race to the Stones, here are useful comments and advice from three people who have taken part.

Lucy Duerdoth (volunteer coordinator with the Ridgeway National Trail, Martin Beecher (a National Trail volunteer) and Rebecca McNaught (member of Oxfordshire County Council Countryside Access team) share their experiences of preparing for the Race and memories of the event.

Rebecca and Martin walked all the way, Lucy walked and ran 50-50. Rebecca and Lucy took the two-day option (50 km each day) while Martin did the whole 100 km without a sleepover. Lucy raised sponsorship for her participating charity, The Friends of the Ridgeway, to preserve the spirit of the Ridgeway and maintain and improve the Trail.



**Lucy**, who did it in 2022, explained that she "... set out to see how my training went and decided to set myself three goals for the event (which is what I typically do for any sport event): to enjoy myself in the training and the event (for the majority of the time); to finish it within the 24hrs; to walk half and run half each day.

**Rebecca** also did it in 2022, walking all the way, with, like Lucy, an overnight stop in a tent at the 50 km mark. "I walked with a friend who I had trained with, but not walked a 'race' with before. We joined up with a solo walker on day 2 and were the last three over the finish line, just within the set time limit."



**Martin** completed the Race to the Stones twice, in 2018 and 2019. "I guess you forget the exhaustion, blisters and lost toenails." He walked all the way, without an overnight sleep.



## Sense of achievement

“I got a real sense of achievement – of both sticking to my training programme and completing the event,” said Lucy. “I also found that I built up my endurance running and that I really enjoyed the running training and exploring my local area and other areas, as I had to keep training even when on holiday. It also got me out running in places and distances I wouldn’t have done otherwise. And I also got fitter and stronger.”

Martin said that “The views along the Ridgeway are nothing short of spectacular and you really get the sense of how it must have been so long ago when you do it as one continuous section.

“I have now done three 100K walks, each over 2 days,” remarked Rebecca. “The Race to the Stones was my favourite.” Shortly after writing this Rebecca was going to do a 50K one-day walk. “This is addictive. And a great way to keep up your fitness all year round.”

## Training

**Lucy** commented that “I’d never done anything this long before in one discipline - I did the Coast to Coast 105 miles in Scotland in 2017 but that was running, cycling and kayaking, and I’ve done Duathlons and Triathlons before, so I was intrigued as to how I’d find the training and if I could do it and enjoy it. I started my training in February and followed a 20-week training programme (based on the ones we had access to once you signed up to RTTS), as I wasn’t running that far at that point - I was recovering from a back injury.

“I started in February as I knew I was going away on holiday in June and this gave me buffer time for not rigorously sticking to my training programme whilst away on holiday. It really depends on what your base-line running/walking distances are when you start, and you need to factor in what time you have to give to training not just in the weeks and weekends but also what holidays have you got planned.”

Lucy also did other forms of exercise - cycling, swimming, HIIT, circuits and/or core strength classes, “cross training can help you prevent and recover from injury by adding mobilisation, stability and strength to joints and muscles, while increasing your overall fitness.”



Lucy in a running phase

**Martin** said that his training “... consisted of walking from Ivinghoe Beacon to Watlington and ensuring I did it well with 12 hours. Theory was that if I could do 50-something km in under 12 hours then 100 km is achievable. That worked for me, but I do a fair bit of walking anyway. If you are a couch potato then you may struggle with lack of stamina and more injuries. I didn’t suffer any blisters (I felt sorry for those that did) but I did lose both of my big toenails. They turned black and fell off after a week or so (not on the day of the race itself) but they do grow back!”



Lucy sets off.

## “Looking after your feet is the most important thing once on the walk. That and hydration.” Tips and experiences during the Race

**Martin** mainly walked the 100 km. “The only stipulation of the race is to complete it within 24 hours, whether that is a straight 24 hours or split over the two days of 12 hours each (Saturday and Sunday). There are electronic timers at the beginning, halfway and at the finish so they keep track.” I elected to complete them in one go without a sleepover at the half-way point (I doubt I would have had any sleep anyway – they had a bar there. Can you imagine how you’d feel in the morning, I do!).

“The first 50 km of the race was tiring on the feet but there were pit stops that had drinks, snacks, everything you needed, just help yourself. And, of course, fresh water to keep hydrated, very important.”

### Reflections

**Rebecca** considers that “It’s much better to do the Race to the Stones with someone, preferably a team, to give you encouragement especially when you are tired and you need to leave the comfort of the pit stop (one every 10 km or so). Having said that there are plenty of people you meet along the way who you will chat with and share stories, reasons for doing the race, generally in support of a charity.”

Rebecca walked all the way, completing it in about 24 hours. “It is an event for all (although there is a strict time limit to stick to).”



**Lucy** chose to run and walk: “I wanted to see the Ridgeway and join up all the bits I work on. I wasn’t particularly interested in walking/running through the night. I ran 25km both days and walked 25km both days, getting the running done first, and then walking afterwards.

The second 50 km, during which Martin wore a head torch, was harder. “I set off again from the half-way point after taking on board lots of food around 8 o’clock in the evening to tackle the next 50 km. I felt fine for the first 10 km or so then my body/feet must have remembered the previous 50 km and decide to protest. Then you just have to remember to keep putting one foot in front of the other and ignoring any complaints from them.”

**Rebecca** and her friend took two days to complete the event and had full support from the organisers along the whole route. “My biggest tip is the socks – we changed our socks at every stop, and taped our feet in the known ‘hot spots’ before we even started the walk and used talc! Looking after your feet is the most important thing once on the walk. That and hydration.”



**Martin** walked through the night. “Walking the Ridgeway in the pitch black of night was interesting. Obviously, a head torch was needed even if just to see the path, but it was magical to experience nature at that time of night and see other torch lights in the distance, or were they fireflies?”

Martin remembers “I was at the 80 km pit stop just as the sun was announcing dawn around 4.30 or so. That was quite something to see and I spent far too long looking at it and needed to catch up on some time into Ogbourne St. George. I must admit to being very tired at the finish line and forgot to take photos.”

## Fundraising tips

**Lucy:** “emailed out to friends, family. I think social media can be a great help in getting your cause out there and your reasons for doing the event and why you want to support that charity.”

**Rebecca:** “I did things like car boot sales, small sponsored walks (with the kids) and raffles leading up to the event, rather than just asking people to donate. Another idea is getting people to guess your time, with a small prize for the closest as this keeps people interested all the way through the walk.”

**Martin:** “used social media for most of my fundraising and emailed everyone in my contacts list, even if I had not emailed, seen, or spoken to them for years. 100 km in under 24 hours? Not your average charity activity so it’s got to be worth something.”



Rebecca, left, at the finish.

Thank you to Rebecca, Lucy and Martin for sharing your experiences with us. Good Luck to everyone taking part in the Race to the Stones.

Here’s the event website <https://www.thresholdtrailseries.com>

