

MACMILLAN. CANCER SUPPORT



Mac4x4 2009 with Julia Bradbury

After months of planning, fund raising and general excitement the day has arrived! We don't want to be the first at the start line (like last year) so we arrive fashionably early- 2 hours before the start. This is only to discover we are one of the last to arrive at the Craven Arms Start point, with the first challenge parking in number order.

We then start to distribute our sponsor's products, namely Red Kooga Energiene and Rockstar energy drink. I set off with the Red Kooga giving a pack or two to every competitor, Alun set off distributing the Rockstar. Having walked round all 60 cars and every competitor, Alun (leaning on the car, drinking a can of Rockstar) said that once somebody had tried Rockstar he almost had to fight them off! We then spent all weekend saying 'sorry none left' when asked for more cans (apart from our secret stash- we are kind, not stupid).

Another sponsor, Octopus Publishing Group, had supplied us with a number of 'Philips Navigator Britain' map books, and we raised funds by selling these to other competitors. Normally, we take every OS map we possess and between Alun and I- that's quite a few! But this year the organisers had insisted that every competitor had a Philips Navigator Britain map book (convenient for us!) and based the event on it. A masterstroke by the organisers, this map book is a revelation- clear 1.5 Inch to the mile mapping, all the little details you need and the ability to take map references off it.

For this event, it made our OS maps redundant at a stroke.



After booking in, scrutineering, receiving vehicle numbers, pep talk from the organisers we have our start time. We were number 26- the cars are started at minute intervals so we set off 26 minutes after the 12:00 start time. We draw up to the start line, exchange pleasantries with the start marshal (Macmillan's very own Peter Rowland), who hands us our clues and counts us down- we're off!

Alun quickly cross references the first page of clues with the Philips Navigator Map book and the left-right-straight-on decision is made with confidence and we turn right heading north.

This section is a straight forward treasure hunt where we are given clues in order, and we know we have missed one when we get to the next one. We miss a battlefield instruction just before a roundabout near Shrewsbury, so I complete a very difficult u-turn in heavy traffic, drive past the sign, complete another difficult u-turn and get the clue- success! (Well it would have been if the same sign was not at every roundabout for the next 5 miles).

We eventually pick up the M56 and then the M6 towards Lancaster, no clues on the motorway so it's a relaxing time. At junction 54 it all starts again, more clues but we feel more in the groove until we miss another. Against our 'never-u-turn-again policy' we go back for it, don't find it and having time in hand, go back again. We give up and go to the check in at White scar caverns.



After handing in our check sheets another competitor tells us the answer was easy, some kind of very vague reference to the 'hitchhikers guide to the galaxy'. Its day one and we know we have a problem. Then to compound this, we have a selection of photographs to put in the order. Apparently, we have driven past them all- this may have been easier if we had seen even half of them.



We are now given a set of Tulip diagrams (called tulips not because they look like a tulip, because they were first used in the Tulip rally in Holland) which are simple; the black dot is you; the arrow is where you should be going. These we are used to, so we had a very pleasant drive through the national park via possibly the best known 'remote roads' (thanks to Top Gear televising it) of the Buttertubs pass between Swaledale and Wensleydale.

The drive may have been spoilt by us now trying to remember every odd looking post or gate in readiness for the next 'question and answer', and just to rub it in the organisers could not resist including a clue on possibly the only pub for miles, knowing we cannot get a drink there! Enough to say that the Tan hill inn at 1732ft is the

highest pub in Britain and the wildness of the remote windswept moorland was underlined by the owners orange ex military 'Snow cat' parked outside, no wonder it makes it a double glazing and solar heating companies dream. No idea what it's like inside.



As we approach the overnight stop at Cotherstone on the River Tees, we are suddenly confronted with a lot of competitors going in the opposite direction; a quick double check ensures we are still on track for the finish at Doe Park caravan site, but we are concerned we have missed something. The check in team confirms they are all heading for the nearest pub.



We decide to stay at the camp site, and with tents up, supper cooked and tea drank we then socialising round the camp. The cry of 'did you see the clue at ???' and what did you get for ??? being a regular heard comment. We did discover a problem with our packing, as although you name it, we have it- but no Scotch. Note for next year.

Saturday morning's briefing warned of a long day and a necessity to keep the fuel tank topped up as the planned night section would require half a tank of fuel. We started after the count down '26 minutes past the hour', most competitors had parked immediately after the start to plan the route, but Alun waved me past saying he could 'plot' as travelled, cross referencing the clues with the Philips map book. We turned left out of the campsite and ominously (and correctly) headed north. Scotland 'here we come ready or not'.

We needed to collect more clues while heading past Hadrians Wall towards Bellingham on edge of Northumberland's national park, then onto the border park forest drive (closed to all other traffic) to get next set of instructions. These consisted of a list of 'spot' heights (the numbers round the hill contours on the map) and these needed to be transferred to an OS map; this would then give us the route to the next 'control'. Being ever helpful I made a cup of tea while Alun did a great job of this.



Having completed this section, the next instructions were easy; plot a route to Kielder and collect as many clues as possible. I think the term 'lulled into a false sense of security' would apply here, having spotted a clue floating on a plastic 'decoy duck' in a river we thought we had finally got the job sussed.



The next set of clues, three maps, a list of 1 km squares, a set of entry's to the squares on the os map with exit from the same square. I went and made tea, we didn't need tea, it's just the thunder clouds inside the car looked more threatening than the ones outside the car. The route plotted and Alun let me back in the car. Just as well really as the weather started to prove just why they built the biggest man made lake in Europe at Kielder.

The route took us to Newcastleton, with the deteriorating weather making collecting clues more difficult by the minute. A control at Castleton was cruelly inside a pub, and here they gave us the clues. A list of gridlines you needed to cross, put together in the right order and therefore forming your route. I made tea (OK; I got the drinks from the bar), and some 30 minutes later (we were in a pub) we were ready. Well I say ready, the rain had brought nightfall early and we were heading into the remote moorlands towards Lockabie- an interesting combination

We now played a new game, spotting the road, versus a river, difficult to tell on a number of occasions. Time was now against us and we dropped the last loop in favour of the main road and a chip shop. We should also mention at this point Alun correctly guessed two of the last clues from the map only! This enabled us to reach the Queens Hotel on time for the evening section.

To the disappointment of all, the planned off road night section was abandoned due to the weather, not surprising really as I am sure half the event would not have got out of the car park let alone round a off road course in the dark! Instead we completed what is called a table top rally. This consisted of a map and the instructions you needed to make a route, against the clock. As neither Alun nor I had ever seen this sort of thing before, even the fact the map was just outside our local town of Wolverhampton was of no help let's just say we did not win.



Amazingly the weather got worse, there was not a spare hotel bed to be found in Lockerbie, and just when we were deciding to sleep in the car or get soaked camping on the Hotel Lawn, Derek (another competitor) knocked on the window, saying he lived a mile away and would we like to sleep on his floor- a 5 star floor it was too!

Sunday; I think around twelve of us slept a Derek's house, bodies' everywhere- though more importantly I should say DRY bodies everywhere. Defiantly preferable to camping! Breakfast was interesting; almost everybody had a box of 6 eggs and a pack of bacon with them. After a very hearty breakfast we tidied our stuff up, filled the fridge and left. Rather like the three bears in reverse, no broken chairs though.

Starting from the Hotel we set off towards the Duke of Buccleuchs estate in Dumfries and Galloway, and whilst looking for more sections of number plate, we continued through the forest of Ae. At one point we got caught in a traffic jam by Lock Ettrick, we briefly discussed the possibility of the delay being caused by someone 'leaving the road' and the ensuing 'fight' to render assistance first. The mystery jam was caused by people stopping to take

photos of Julia 'posing' on the top of a Land rover; of course we joined in (with the photos, not the posing).

The next section was a navigation exercise through Morton Wood and Dukes estate looking for the never ending sections of number plates, this time we needed to keep to an average speed of 15 mph. Some competitors obviously missed this instruction and 'backed' the field up. Then another competitor parked in front of the sign we were looking for, so we 'wrong slotted' (posh term for taking a wrong turning) and really had to pick the speed up to try and get back on course.



The following section was simply Questions on 'spot locations' (points on the map you can see from the road), covering the journey from Carronbridge to Gretna Green Services. I say simply but like everything else on the event, relax, and you have missed a 'spot location'.

We arrive at Gretna Green Services to be confronted by the final task, another photo memory test from all three days. I think we can safely say we were as rubbish at this as the first one

The Finish meal and presentations were again at the De Ver Hotel, Daresbury Cheshire. Where did we finish? Who cares (so not 1st then), the winner every year is Macmillan Cancer Support, with the total fundraising for 2009 being £106,115.30.

A special mention must go to The AA men, four of them in two land rovers had given up their time to follow us round the event, ensuring as many of us got to the end as possible. They attended over 20 incidents, working in all weathers and followed the same clues as we did.

Julia Bradbury and her sister Gina, two of the nicest people you could wish to meet (all the time), and for celebrities that's saying something.



John Innes from Insigns for the fantastic vehicle graphics. They took John half a day to fit, two days for me to remove.

De Ver Hotel Daresbury Cheshire, for their continued support with the venue and not batting an eyelid when 60 unwashed teams arrive in their nice clean Hotel. Super service, meals and genuinely nice staff.

Our thanks as ever to those who supported us in this event, far to many to mention, but try a few, Dawn from V Festival, Richard Egger Insurance, Octopus Publishing Group, Go Ape, Red Kooga Energise, Rockstar energy, Penkrige Round Table, Dave Hughes, all my friends and relatives, last but not least our wives Christine and Lynn for being the support that enables us to do this event (and when seeing what we have packed, constantly asking the question 'how long are you going for').

We finished 19th with 167 points, the winner had 207 points and was 9 points clear of second place.



2010 is going to be an epic year, the 60 competitors going up to 90 and as the organisers are unlikely to take the 'not enough off road in 2009' comment lying down, we could be looking at raising £150k sponsorship.

Please help us support Macmillan Cancer Support (Registered Charity No 261017) its one of those things in life when it's better to care for Macmillan cancer support than have Macmillan cancer support care for you.

Any goods, services or cheques can be sent to Clayton Car Contracts, Staffordshire House, Beverley Close, Penkrige, Staffordshire ST19 5SS
01785 716133 0783 83 76800

Also please supply any 'stickers' or other promotional items you wish to be displayed to the same address.

All costs for this event are paid by Sean Flynn, Clayton Car Contracts and Alun Beardmore all donations go 100% directly to Macmillan Cancer Support.

With thanks, And the hope you will never meet the business end of Macmillan Cancer Support.

Sean & Alun

Sean Flynn & Alun Beardmore

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Please sponsor my Macmillan Cancer Support challenge 2010 at www.justgiving.com/alunandsean

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