

Harriers International

Stafford Harriers are well known for their sorties off to far-flung places around the world but it may surprise some to know that although long haul is recent, the trips are not new. As far back as 1988 The Harriers made a trip to Majorca to take part in the marathon and combine it with a couple of weeks sunshine. Then groups started to go all around Europe taking in Athens, Malta, the famous Benidorm trips, Dublin, Cyprus and Paris. The long haul flights came later.

Harriers didn't realise that the long haul era was coming when one evening early in 2000 two young men met Pete Burns on the car park of the MRI and asked if they could run with the Harriers. They were Deon Vlok and Eduardo DaSilva two South African dentists. They duly joined the Harriers and with Mike Nugent, another South African member, and all we heard for the next few months were the tales of The Comrades Marathon (56 miles) and The Two Oceans Marathon (35 miles) in South Africa.

It was then suggested that maybe the Harriers ought to take part in one of these 'real' marathons. Deon and Mike sorted out accommodation in Capetown and Pete sorted out the flights and the trip to the Two Oceans Marathon was conceived. The trip cost the princely sum of £700 for two weeks in an hotel right by the Victoria and Albert Waterfront in Capetown. Bargain.

Thirty-Four Harriers, family and friends jetted off for Easter 2002. It is advertised as the world's most beautiful marathon and we couldn't argue with that, but 35 miles was something of a challenge in the heat for those that ran the full marathon.



Here are half the party all togged up in their Harriers shirts after registration. Whilst walking around the registration a very famous South African sports reporter (their Dickie Davies) stopped Deon and Pete and asked about the Harriers trip. He asked them if they were willing to do a piece for the TV news report. The said yes and were soon in front of the cameras for an interview. Pete was interviewed first in English (which was fortunate) and then Deon was interviewed in Afrikaans. The interviews went out that evening on the main African News. Not just to South Africa but to the whole of Africa. So Stafford Harriers got their 15 minutes of fame.

So after the trip to Africa the question next was where to next? We happened to have had two members of the club from Canada namely Rick and Donna. They were going back to Canada and suggested that the Harriers may like to make a trip out to Vancouver for the Marathon and then take in a trip across the Rockies. It didn't take much to persuade the Harriers to make the trip. So in 2003 thirty-two Harriers set off across the Atlantic. Rick sorted out the hotel in Vancouver and then a week's tour was organised to take the Harriers across the Rockies by coach taking in Kaloomps, Banff and Calgary. Where the Capetown Marathon had been very hot the Vancouver one was very wet.



Here are the runners at the registration with Rick and Donna at the front between Graham Williams and Allen Aukim.

Then the question was where next? We had run out of Harriers from different countries to help us out so we had to decide were else to go. The answer was obvious, Sri Lanka. The first attempt to book the holiday was thwarted by the devastating Tsunami

that hit the country on Boxing Day in 2004. The 2005 trip was put on hold as the marathon was cancelled and it was rearrange for 2006. This time 24 Harriers went off to Colombo in October for the Marathon and Half Marathon. Capetown had been hot; Vancouver wet; Colombo was hot and wet. The memorable moment on this holiday was the first night in Sri Lanka had a full moon. They do not serve alcohol in Sri Lanka when there is a full moon. A Harriers first night on holiday with no alcohol, well that was a first.



Here we have the Harriers party in the field where the registration took place. They are different shirts from the South Africa photo.

The next decision to be made was where next. It was decided the Caribbean was the most obvious and so the 2008 trip to Cuba was arranged. Only 18 members on this trip to Havana but it was another of those memorable trips. Havana is a must see city and the following week in an all-inclusive hotel was a great way to recover from the marathon. Unfortunately due to injury and sickness only two of the party ran and Dave Preece is now the only Harrier to run on every long haul marathon. This one was again hot but very humid as well. Here are the party relaxing with their rep 'Jesus'.

