

We were a mixed bunch.

Christine Armstrong - June 2007

Katie is something in the city. She must move in very different circles from me: a friend had bet £10,000 for her chosen charity that she couldn't run the Great North Run (but she had and now the stakes have been raised even further...).

Marnie was one of my roomies: she was a young mum just about to return to work in Argos central offices now that her youngest was a year old.

James was a journalist: he was allegedly a beginner, having come to this weekend to write 700 words all about it for a (the?) Cardiff daily paper.

Karen and Gareth were a couple who must have known it was going to be good: they were second-timers.

Some had come alone like me but some were here with a friend, others with sisters. About 25 of us in all were in Stow in the Wold Youth Hostel for a running weekend offered by Purple Patch Running.

Our reasons for being there were varied but essentially we all were keen to know how to run better. Some were even keen enough to go out for the welcome 'easy' run despite the pouring rain that accompanied our arrival on Friday evening.

Personally, I was conserving my strength for the next day: I knew there were to be 3 (yes, THREE) running sessions on Saturday. I was shown to my room at the top of the creaky listed building. 6 of us were in a bunk bedded room that had its own shower and loo. I abandoned my bag there and returned to the communal sitting room to gossip to others who were sensibly staying dry. I thought I had died and gone to heaven when I was offered a glass of wine, followed by a bowl of olives and a plate of veggie sticks and strips of freshly toasted pitta to accompany a yoghurt homemade dip. Dinner itself was just as good: chilli and rice, tortillas, guacamole, salsa and salad (and more wine of course). All the food was plentiful, homemade and tasted fabulous. We were then introduced to the team, and listened to their credentials. Chris and Claire are Purple Patch Running, and they had roped in friends and colleagues to help so that we could run in 4 groups, more closely matched in ability. Everyone was keen on running, but Chris and Claire were also qualified experts. Chris is a lecturer in Sports Science and is a coach. Claire was a fitness instructor and, coached by Chris, had run a marathon in under 3 hours.

The weekend packed a lot in: we had motivational tips and an experience of self hypnosis from the exuberant Lisa Jackson, the author of 'Running made Easy', a pub-style quiz (that revealed how ignorant we all were about this, our chosen hobby), coaching talks about the theory of the running sessions, sports massages from Mark (who worked non-stop) and of course some runs. I did actually manage the 3 on Saturday (see evidence of this in the pics on their website www.purplepatchrunning.com). There was an early morning easy run, a hill training session and a tempo run and I was still up for the long run on Sunday (10 miles in gorgeous rolling Cotswold scenery). I although I could barely walk on Monday, I still felt smug.

Would I go again? Definitely. There was very little to find fault with and I enjoyed both the challenge and the company enormously. Those of you who have ever run with me know I don't do well at hills: I must get better there's no avoiding them at Stow or at Purple Patch's other venue in the Brecon Beacons. So I will be thinking of fitting another weekend before long. Anyone fancy joining me?