

My good deed doing the South Downs Marathon. By Jackie Barker.

I took part in the SD marathon again and what a lovely day it was. My running buddy today said he always chooses this event, because he loves the fact tea is served in proper cups, food is on china plates and proper cutlery. He did also mention the organisers were pretty ok as well - always smiley, which I will 100% agree with.

We set off and stuck together for first 20 miles or so, enjoying the fantastic clear views and great route. We were quite complacent having done this event a number of times, so you tend to know where you are going without looking at Route Directions. I was lagging behind with less fresh legs. I had asked buddy to carry on and meet me at the finish which was fine. He was never that far ahead of me, normally in sight but lost him at one stage, I turned left as Route Directions had told me - no buddy in sight. I got to next c/p and they had not seen buddy, I was first through - strange as he was faster than me!

I continued up on SDW and turned above Long Man of Wilmington. I obviously then skipped a few VERY IMPORTANT words, like, GO PAST Trig point, then turn right. I failed to do this and turned right after first gate keeping fence on my right, as instructed and continue downhill (forgot/misread the 'stay on the ridge' bit). I ran down quite some way and was not recognising my surroundings, got to 2 gates and as hard as I tried, I could not make my surroundings match the Route Directions! After wasting even more minutes I decided to back track UP the field again.

On my way up I noticed something I had whizzed past going downhill. A sheep with her head stuck in 'sheep proof fencing!' Only a sheep could do that. I went over to her quietly, visualising her panicking as I got close, trying to pull backwards and her head coming off. She stayed calm-ish as I covered my Route Directions with a large flint so it did not blow away, carefully negotiated climbing the first fence with 2 strands of barbed wire on the top to get to her. Her twin lambs lying beside her seemed unaware of their mothers plight. She was well and truly STUCK!! She had obviously been there some time as the skin on her neck was pretty raw. Down on my hands and knees, I was trying to force her backwards through the tiny square of fencing she had become trapped in, her bottom was backed into thick gorse. As much as I tried to push her backwards, flatten and fold back her ears. She would not budge. As much as I pushed her, she pushed against the fence and me with all her weight. Her eyes were rolling either way and she was grinding her teeth. Her fleece was wound round the wire and tight round her neck. Help, what do I do?? If I leave her - she WILL die, horrible way to go and very smelly, dead sheep. Pondered on what to do, as I was off route I was not going to see any runners to assist.

I heard a noise, stood up and saw to my utter disbelief and relief, there was girl cycling up on her mountain bike with 2 dogs in the same field as the sheep. I called her, she stopped, tied up her dogs and pushed through the gorse. It probably took us another 5 minutes as she pulled on sheep's fleece from behind, I pushed from my side and flatten ears, sheep resisted with all her might - then our magic worked, she was free and ungratefully trotted off to greet her twins.

This left me to continue up the field and try and backtrack to where I could find my place on the Route Directions and landscape, leaving me to finish the last few miles. OK, so I had done 29.45 miles and lost a lot of time, but one 'silly' sheep was there to live another day. And never have baked beans on toast tasted SO wonderful.