

London diary

[In 1986, I started work at Queen Mary College, London, while still living in Wolvercote, on the northern edge of Oxford looking over Port Meadow. To celebrate the move, I applied for a place in the 1987 London marathon. This diary records what happened. During this time, Hester was 11, Neill 9 and James 7. Footnotes are editorial, having been added while typing it up. – PJC, January 2014.]

Saturday 6/12/86

A fat letter came for me this morning. Through the address window my age, 40, was clearly visible – a double injustice since I am in fact 39. From this I was able to guess what it must be, and from the thickness of the letter I assumed that the answer must be yes.

I had been almost certain that I wouldn't get in. My qualifications – a veteran, never run a marathon before, and (presumably most important) never been turned down for the London before – didn't look too good, in view of the "one in four" that had been quoted. They weren't to know (and certainly wouldn't have been interested if they had known) that, in my long-gone youth, I was Australian Universities' Cross-Country champion, University of Queensland Athletic Club track 10000 metres record holder (31.20) and had run 15 miles on the road in 83.28; nor that, while yet far from those times, in the last few years I have come from complete unfitness to a half-marathon time of 79.39 at Witney this September. The only clue they had was that I had given my expected time as 3.05.00, which might be a little surprising coming from a veteran novice.

Monday 8/12/86

Yesterday evening, I did a session of yoga, my first for a long while, and very good it felt too. I've had a little trouble with my back lately, due at least in part to typing, and nothing helps like yoga. (I've some evidence it's good for other things too.) Then, there was the doctor in one of the running magazines warning of the danger of invoking devils!

I didn't run today (following my own advice!), but did a little preparatory exploration. I found my way into the Students' Union building to the general office, where I offered to pay for the use of showers and changing room. The woman there was reluctant to take my money unless I were at least using the

gym, and when the administrator came along, she put it to him and he agreed that I should not have to pay. I found my way downstairs to the changing room. Certainly, if I had paid, I wouldn't have got very much for my money. But the gesture made me feel hopeful about the whole thing.

In the evening, I did yoga again. Early to bed, so I didn't meditate at the end of the session.

Tuesday 9/12/86

So today I tried the experiment. After my lecture, I put my keys, identity card, season ticket, and money in my purse and went over to the Union building to change. At 10.23 I set out along the Mile End Road and turned along the canal.

It was a glorious morning for the experiment. Sunny, light breeze (against me going out), cloudless sky. The sun sparkled on the water and on some mirror mosaics by the towpath. The scenery was more varied than you would find in that distance anywhere else, from derelict wharves to chintzy Islington High Street, from a London park with ducks on the lake to a school playground, from something out of Thetis Blacker's dream of Hell¹ to modern factories and warehouses. A good surface underfoot, no roads to cross. Until I reached Islington, that is.

I believe there is a walkway to the other end of the Islington Tunnel; I saw it on a map but couldn't find it. I want to get further; more delights are promised, such as the Kings Cross railway yards and Regents Park Zoo. But I didn't persevere, but turned round.

Feeling fresh, after a break studying the map, I flew for a while, but slowed, nicely tired, to finish in just under an hour.

Wednesday 10/12/86

For a contrast, today I ran in Wytham Woods. That was also beautiful. Last time I went there, the autumn golds were still on the trees; but today, the woods were mostly grey and brown, with very dark green where some of the trunks were swathed in ivy, two quite different shades of white (the dry grass and the old man's beard), and, astonishingly, a mist of pink-red, which was probably rose-hips but gave the appearance of a pink-flowering cherry about to burst into bloom.

It was another wonderful day, with the sun low in the sky, just getting over the ridge, so that my shadow stretched for miles (not literally) down the grassy

¹Thetis Blacker, *A Pilgrimage of Dreams*, which I had acquired in King's Lynn in 1975.

park-like meadow above the abbey. The longer views over Oxford were misty blue. Floods on Port Meadow were conspicuous.

I didn't time myself, but it was in the low to middle 50s. This is not bad: only three training days into my buildup, I'm running only 5–10% slower than at my peak in September.

Afterwards, I typed for a while, and felt a little stiff at the end of it, but not too bad. All this, after lugging shopping around town all morning. I couldn't have done this a year ago!

Friday 12/12/86

A bad start to the day. Cycling down to the station at 7.40, I put on my brakes to stop at the lights at roadworks in the Woodstock Road, and landed on my right hand and hip on the road, with papers spilling everywhere. The rest of the way to the station, my little finger felt a bit numb, but so far it seems that my hip has suffered no damage. Perhaps it will seize up as it cools.

The morning absolutely spectacular, sun burning through fog and frost, subdued colours glowing everywhere.

By lunch it was clear that my knee had suffered, not my hip. But by evening, it was still quite OK to run on, so I went out to Cumnor roundabout and back. It was even later than Sunday, about 4.30 start, and too dark for hard effort. Every car coming the other way either failed to dip its lights, or forced me into a hedge or puddle, or both. What is there about cars that does that to drivers? I'm sure most of those drivers are quite ordinary people who would be upset if told they were being thoughtless and inconsiderate. Whatever it is, I want no part of it. I shall avoid driving at all costs. But anyway, it wasn't a slow run, despite conditions, and my knee only gave the merest indication that anything was amiss. By the end of the evening, it had stiffened up a bit.

Saturday 13/12/86

Last night was our annual algebraists' and hangers-on's cooking evening.² As a result, I ate far more than I needed, and didn't get to bed until 3.30am. (But I was playing the guitar brilliantly in patches, especially "Anji", and even singing

²Many algebra students and postdocs in Oxford in the 1980s will remember these events, which involved communally cooking and eating lots of food and singing Leonard Cohen and Tom Lehrer songs.

tolerably well.) This may well be the last such occasion. By next year, Jacinta will have left, probably Annabel too, and of my students only Tracey will be here doing research; and I don't really think she'll continue the tradition.

Downtown, shopping, my knee was definitely worse; it was fairly clear that I shouldn't run on it. I soaked it in the bath in the afternoon, and rubbed Deep-Heat into it afterwards. There is no pain unless I try to bend it back too far, or exercise it too vigorously. I hope and trust that it will clear up quite quickly. In any case, it could have come at a much worse time. I could take another two months' break without really hurting my chances in May, provided that things go right then. I'm running now because I enjoy running, rather than because of a desperate race to get fit. So the right strategy now must err on the side of softness, too much rest rather than too little. But fingers crossed!

Sunday 14/12/86

I think, or hope, that this sore knee won't be as serious as some mishaps I've had in the last few years of running. Moderate exercise doesn't seem to make it any worse, and yoga seems to help.

Last night I babysat,³ and did some yoga; at the end of it, the knee was hardly noticeable. Today we went walking in Wytham Woods, and at the end it was a bit worse.

Two beautiful images from Wytham: identification of the pink mist, a bright pink-red multi-lobed seed pod, species unknown, that grows on a tree and contains several brilliant orange seeds;⁴ and the twilight bands of colour seen through the trees, green for the farmland, slate for the sky, and bright orange for the town (including Wolvercote).

James was desperately sad that we didn't walk right round; a quick change for him, since he had had to be dragged from the house to come. Hester was keen until she lost her doll's leg, and then was inconsolable. Somehow, the lot of them managed to get on my nerves to an extraordinary extent.

Monday 15/12/86

Still not back to running.

³We belonged to a token-based babysitting circle, and since I could work anywhere, I earned many tokens.

⁴It was spindle.

As I started to say yesterday, I have had an unusual number of injuries since going back to running moderately seriously. The worst of these have been a hip, that burned like fire and reduced me to hobbling around (it was possible to run on it once it warmed up, but warming up was an absurd exercise, limping along the street until the pain eased off enough to allow me to run), a calf muscle that “went” a couple of times while out on a long run from home (and each time I could feel it beginning to go), and, most recently, achilles tendon trouble, so that there was no spring in my feet and I ran like a wooden doll. Fortunately, at present there’s nothing wrong with me apart from the knee, and I’m not apprehensive about that (yet). My memory of “before” (i.e. 1962–1969) is that I was almost injury-free (in fact, my training diary shows that I used little things as an excuse for not training far too often), so I must now be seeing the effect of age: more injuries, and injuries much slower to heal.

Tuesday 16/12/86

A piece of technology that may be of considerable importance for my running: yesterday, I bought myself a portable computer, a Tandy TRS-80 Model 100. I got nearly £80 discount because it is a discontinued model (in fact the only thing it hasn’t got that the replacement has is a modem) and was the second last left in the shop. Today I took it on the train to London and got nearly a whole paper typed. I also made the happy discovery that, if you type with the keyboard on your knees, you don’t get backache. (Is that the reason for those detachable keyboards you see?) This is very liberating; I spend a lot of time typing (I’m getting caught up, at least, on lots of outstanding papers), and the backache, whether or not it does any long-term damage, makes me less inclined to run. The other thing it saves me from is the terrible cold up on my shelf in the winter.⁵ Of course, I’d still have to sit there to edit and print the text, and today I had to write the program for getting the machines to communicate.⁶ (And oh, the sense of achievement when I succeeded, even though it is only at 1200 baud!)

Wednesday 17/12/86

On and off in the last week and a half (and indeed for many years now), I’ve been exercising, mostly elementary yoga. Since I’m not a bendy person, I can’t do

⁵I had a workspace on a “shelf” above the upstairs front room and over the bedroom behind.

⁶My other computer at the time was a Sinclair ZX Spectrum.

anything too fancy; but even what I do seems to do a lot of good, and makes me feel marvellous afterwards (though I've no compelling evidence about the long-term effects). Especially good seem to be the bow and the cobra (for unbending my back, counteracting my bad posture), the lion (which somehow purges my lungs and mouth), and the tree (which improves balance). With the cow-face, right-hand over I can clasp hands, but left-hand over I'm miles off – why?

Recently I've added a bit of kum nye,⁷ in place of some of the least enjoyable asanas. My favourite exercise of all is the one involving bouncing back and drooping forward. It obviously does something dramatic to the blood flow to the brain, which is a bit unnerving; but the bouncing sensation, and the immense relaxation when you go over, are incomparable!

Thursday 18/12/86

Hester's birthday today – and spent in a slightly strange way that would have made running difficult even had my knee been better. I picked her up from school at 11.15, cycled down town with her, found some safety pins to pin up her torn shirt and some chips as a reviver, dumped her at the Wesley Memorial Church while I went to the bank and she rehearsed, and then went to hear her choir's⁸ performance in aid of Age Concern in Cornmarket. (I was roped in to sing a bass line.) Then soup and rolls in the Town Hall, further indulgence in Fenwick's, and we cycled home.

From time to time Hester has shown enthusiasm about running. Unfortunately it's always short-lived. She is a graceful animal, and covers the ground easily and with style. But she does seem to have some kind of breathing difficulty after running for a mile or two, and needs to stop for an extended rest. I think that this could be overcome, and that she could be good. When the weather improves, she might be encouraged out occasionally. We tried to persuade her into fun runs last year. But part of the trouble is that I have no enthusiasm or desire for the two-milers with which she should start.⁹

⁷Tibetan exercises.

⁸The Oxford Girls' Choir.

⁹Happily, Hester successfully took up marathon running two decades later.

Friday 19/12/86

After work today, I went present-hunting to the Australian shop in the Strand, and then to the tea shop in Neal Street. In between, of course, was Covent Garden Market. I mention this because, as part of the Londonisation of which the goal of this enterprise is also part, I saw an area with a different feel to the Mile End Road,¹⁰ lifeless with its high-rise flats and barricaded shop windows; the West End, jammed with people, dirty to touch or breathe; or the twee little antique shops or healthy bakeries of Islington. This was a market where modern global-village shops, stalls and products tried to tempt a crowd that was almost Dickensian. Said otherwise, but for the people, the market could have been anywhere; and even some of the people (the collectors for Workers against Racism, for example) were anonymous and transplantable; but snatches of conversation, dress, the antics of street entertainers, and so on, had a feeling of being rooted in the place, of what must be “typical London”.

Perhaps the Marathon itself will have something of the same atmosphere, an event which could only happen in London. Reports from people whose performance has been lifted by the crowds perhaps bear this out.

Saturday 20/12/86

A glorious, but cold, day. Every day the weather is glorious, I'm sure it will be the last, and chide myself for losing an opportunity to inure myself against going out in rain, snow, fog, dark, or whatever the next few months will throw at me. For I did lose it. I went down town shopping (essentials from Sainsbury's). Yet, because Sheila had driven down, and won't even attempt parking nearer than the Mathematical Institute car-park,¹¹ I had to carry the shopping twice as far as usual. By the end of it, both my knee and my temper were fraying, and I didn't venture out until after lunch.

I'm beginning to get a bit worried about this knee. If it was just a bump, shouldn't it be clearing up by now? I haven't run on it for a week, yet I have the feeling that running isn't the problem; carrying heavy loads seems to bring the ache on much more reliably than anything else. The worry, too, is that by favouring the right knee when I run I'll put extra strain on something else. Two years ago I had a blister (from new shoes) on my left foot, resulting (by this

¹⁰The location of Queen Mary College.

¹¹The Mathematical Institute was then at the north end of St Giles'.

process) in injuries first to the right calf, and then most painfully to the left hip. I haven't bought another pair of Nike shoes since then!

Sunday 21/12/86

Even if this hadn't been an extraordinarily hectic day (the boys having a service at 10.30, a rehearsal and carol service at 5.30;¹² Hester a rehearsal at 2.00 and a carol concert at 7.30; Sheila and I going to lunch in Chinnor, and having to detour to look for a new valve for the cistern in the upstairs toilet after I'd broken it, with John's help, yesterday), I don't know whether I would have run. It snowed most of the day. Big, thick wet flakes which didn't settle but were enough to make the roads a bit slippery. My least favourite running conditions.

I have run in fallen snow a few times, notably in Calgary two years ago when the temperature was ten below, and I had only running gear suitable for an exceptionally hot spell in Southern California.¹³ (I just had to run as hard as I could; but the others, in their windproof suits, were astounded.) But falling snow is another matter. I was turned back once in Wytham by a heavy flurry that blew into my eyes and stung my cheeks; and, one terrible time, two-thirds of the way round the ring road, I ran out of energy and simultaneously hit a gale-force headwind which soon brought snow. I hitchhiked back through town that time, my tail firmly between my legs.

Monday 22/12/86

The shortest day. At least, then, one of my most feared adversaries is on the retreat. But again it was a nice day, and again I blew it. I stayed home because Sheila expected to be late. But first, we got the cistern valve from Marston Heating Supplies, and the Christmas turkey etc. from Sainsbury's at Heyford Hill; by then, most of the morning was over and I allowed myself a little rest. Then the house was cold so I had a hot dinner, a moussaka which needed thirty-five minutes plus time for the oven to heat up. After that, Jacinta¹⁴ phoned, and came round to borrow my drill, and when she left, it was already dark.

Isn't it remarkable how, when you want to procrastinate, circumstances conspire to help you? Then again, I could have run in the evening; but Sheila was

¹²Neill and James sang in the St Giles' Church choir downtown.

¹³After a term at Caltech, I made a short trip north in December to visit Burnaby and Calgary.

¹⁴Covington, one of my Oxford DPhil students.

playing squash, then we were going to the party for the St Giles' choristers after their carolling round the streets of the parish, and then we went to John and Ros's¹⁵ to drink some Southern Comfort, and then Hester's radio-controlled car wouldn't work, and it was well after midnight when I got to bed.

I could write it off as Christmas and resolve that in the new year things will change – but would that resolution fare better than others in the past?

Tuesday 23/12/86

I did it, and on an empty stomach and after a trip to London too.

It was a quick trip to London, to finish things that had to be done before Christmas. So I worked on the train, and worked through the lunch hour, and came home on a train that had no buffet. Getting back at 3.40, I changed straight away, put on my reflective bandolier, and set out on the Wytham road. I ran the familiar route, to the Cumnor roundabout and back, setting out into the blaze of sunset and returning when grey evening, wearing its modern sodium jewellery, had enwrapped the world.

It was beautifully easy running, the sort of rhythm which makes you feel you could keep it up all day. I didn't time it, but I think the pace was quite reasonable, comparable to the last couple of outings on that route. My knee gave me no trouble at all, although I may have been favouring it slightly. On the way back, I picked up a big lump of something on my shoe; it had a noticeable effect, simulating resistance running. It was on the left shoe, perhaps fortunately.

At the roundabout, I passed an old lady with a dog, the corners of her mouth turned perpetually down. I turned to come back and passed her again; she gasped with shock, as if her time had come.

Wednesday 24/12/86

Exercising last night, I felt good, and everything was fine, until the last group of positions. But I had a bit of trouble there – my knee didn't want to bend into either the kneeling or cross-legged position. There wasn't pain exactly, but certainly the suggestion of it. Worrying.

Tension was the keynote of the day – from last-minute shopping in the morning, from waiting round in the afternoon, from the kids inevitably sleepless at

¹⁵Bleach, near neighbours.

night, getting up, wandering round, crying, not wanting to say that they were anticipating.

In the past, running on a day of tension, I've had two different reactions. The commoner (thank God!) is that I start off pounding out my anger into the road, and then after a while I rise above it, calmed, and see it in perspective. Whether the effect is long-term, I don't know; it must help. But the other (usually when it is other people's tension and anger primarily) is that I'm wound so tight that something breaks, unless I relax myself with meditation before I go. Like the terrible day my calf muscle went halfway round the Bladon circuit, and I hobbled back swearing aloud at the cars that wouldn't stop, the children, Sheila, God, . . .

I didn't run today.

Thursday 25/12/86

The most pleasant Christmas this family has ever had.

The omens were bad. Against my better judgment, I watched (intermittently) the Alay Ayckbourn play on television last night. A play about nine ordinary, horrifyingly evil, people reacting with one another to turn Christmas into a nightmare. I went to bed tense, not expecting to sleep well. But I took my own advice and relaxed myself.

And from waking-up time, things have just gone so nicely – stockings, croissants and coffee for breakfast, effortless cooking, church with a lovely anthem, delicious results of the cooking, presents, visitors (Angus and Anna¹⁶), children happy, no contention over television.

And I ran. Not far (to the Wytham turn) or fast, and too soon after lunch (sandwiched between late lunch and early darkness), so that I got a slight stitch at the Trout on the way back; but that didn't matter. No knee problems. The pace I took was easy and I held it, while the road fell away behind. All was good.

Fantasy from the run: figure out how to program the computer so that, on switch on, it tells me how many days to go until the tenth of May.

Friday 26/12/86

We went over to Newbury to see Jim and Sue¹⁷.

¹⁶Macintyre, our near neighbours.

¹⁷Crick, Sheila's brother and sister-in-law.

It is in no small part down to Jim that I'm running as much as I am at the moment. It may have been at Christmas time three years ago, I don't really remember (though probably a little later) that we went over there, and Jim showed us his running shoes and told us about his jogs round the estate in the evenings. He'd entered for the Reading half-marathon, and sent me a form. (In the event, I was injured and didn't run; he took two hours and forty minutes.) But with my acceptance came an entry form for Abingdon, and I was hooked.

Among other things, I realised from that first conversation with Jim that I was not just going back to what I had left thirteen years before. Leaving aside changes in me, the shoes made it clear that the technology of running had advanced in that time. And I'm sure it's driven, not by the consumers, but by exploitation of a new mass market by the manufacturers, who take the opportunity to persuade not-so-knowledgable beginners that all these products are essential. Going along with this is the rash of new terminology: pronation, carbohydrate loading, and all the rest of it.

But since then, I just run, even less scientifically than before, and enjoy it more than ever.

Saturday 27/12/86

Someone said at a party a few days ago that the only reason for running that she could see would be to run off into the sunrise or the sunset.

Today I ran off into a magnificent sunset, gold under an arch of cloud in the west, lighting up the eerily flat plain at the top of Cumnor Hill; then I turned round to see a stunning display in the east, clouds of pink melon and dark plum with a bloom of yeast, scraps of icy blue winter sky behind them. I felt as if I were running in the sky.

Cumnor Hill is a bit like Mt Coot-tha, at least in distance, though memory makes the latter much fiercer. That hill was one of my main training grounds, so much so that among my training records, with lap times, course bests, etc., was a page labelled "MAN v MOUNTAIN", recording my times for variations on the theme – to the kiosk, alone or accompanied by one or several of quite a large group, from mentors through contemporaries to my own protégés; round the loop; up the side way through the scrub; to the ridge; and so on. It is one of several real or imaginary mountains that feature in my recurring dreams as well; usually I am running up them, and the experience is always pleasant.

Sunday 28/12/86

A day off, and nothing specific to write about.

The children watched a lot of television today. Television seems to have the effect of tensing me up, pulling the strings too tight. One of the things that grates most is the introspective nature of the medium. As those programmes where people compete to see who knows the most about television programmes. Or the guest celebrities on some programmes who are celebrities only because they are on other programmes. Related to this is another of my pet hates, that very common programme featuring people who are good at one thing making fools of themselves doing something else, as sports personalities on quiz shows, for example.

The few television programmes I do enjoy watching seem to be mostly people doing things they are good at. This Christmas, the only programme I saw more than a smattering of was Eric Clapton on Channel 4 on Christmas night. Now that brought back memories – he still opens the show with Crossroads, that song that gave us¹⁸ some trouble – with its syncopated rhythm, the bass player could never manage to time his entry right!

Monday 29/12/86

I didn't run in the woods today, despite setting off in full daylight for a change (just before midday). I couldn't find the permit for Wytham Woods, and though I've never been challenged there, I'd find it hard to bring myself to go without it. Instead, I went on the circuit down the river to Osney lock, then across to North Hinksey, and back through Wytham. It was a nice gentle run of about eight miles, run a little faster than the pace I'm aiming at for 26 miles in May. I'm not really sure what mileage I should be aiming at just now. Of course, long slow runs would be best, but they eat up so much time! I've never trained for an event so far ahead before, and the risk of peaking early seems enormous. Hopefully, barring injury, this tremendous enthusiasm will keep me going.

Today I did feel a little more sluggish than in the last few days – not worryingly so – but certainly I've had nothing resembling black days I remember, when I've started out, unfit, on long run, and ended up limping home the last few miles, freezing cold!

¹⁸The band I played in as a student in Brisbane: we were originally the Black Stumps, later the Sixteenth Precinct Repair Shoppe.

Tuesday 30/12/86

I meant to write down something that happened yesterday, but forgot.

This spring and summer I increasingly had a strange sensation of being completely disoriented. While going around my everyday business, I'd look up, and suddenly for a moment I'd have no idea where I was. The surroundings would look completely unfamiliar. This happened more often in familiar surroundings (such as walking through a quadrangle in Merton) as in strange ones (such as the math department at Ohio State), but it did occur in both. It comes to mind because once it happened while running out along the road to the University Farm (I think the only time it happened while running, though I always felt vulnerable); and yesterday, while passing the end of that road, it struck me that the experience hadn't happened since the end of the summer.

Of course it's absurd to write it off as psychological – no phenomenon can involve brain or body and not both – but this confirms my feeling that it was connected to the pressure I felt myself under at the time, and the relief of this resulting from the change of jobs has permeated me and shows its effect in many ways.

Weednesday 31/12/86

I've had yet no desire to sum up the old year or anticipate the new, but there are several hours yet . . .

In fact, I haven't run either yesterday or today. A combination of extreme tiredness and visitors. I can and do run even with visitors around, but with old friends not seen for such an age like Sue and John, it would seem a bit impolite, and I would need to be feeling very positive to drag myself into it. The very strong winds yesterday were an added deterrent. Today, I could have gone, but I felt even more tired, and with this party I'll have to last until late.

Excuses, excuses. But I'm writing this in the bath, and I don't quite know what to make of this one. My knee is not troublesome and doesn't affect running (though it still doesn't bend), and now I can see that the swelling below the knee is larger. This swelling I've had since I was at school (I associate it, perhaps wrongly, with an awkward landing after jumping from a bank, and a visit to the doctor who told me not to run in the school cross-country or I might spend half my life on crutches; the headmaster backed him up and effectively banned me from the race, he being more concerned to save me for inter-school competition). It rises and falls, and is now up.

Thursday 1/1/87

Back to a familiar stamping ground today: the Bladon circuit.

It was perhaps not an auspicious time to run. I've had two consecutive late nights, last night (until 2.40) being a standing party, and another lunchtime party today. At the party, my knees felt as if they were on the point of giving out, so I unashamedly sat down for the rest of the time. Then, on getting back, I set straight off on my run.

I felt stiff and sluggish at the start, so much so, that I considered turning off at Yarnton and doing the shorter circuit to Cassington, But I kept on. My stride wouldn't open out, and I could feel my right knee: a high-pitch, but low-intensity, sensation.

On that road, you are always very aware of the weather. A shower came over about Begbroke and soaked me, then the wind rose to chill me. It was full in my face through Bladon, then a crosswind on the dream stretch, a beautiful few miles of tiny but straight country road, mostly downhill after an initial climb, aiming straight for the looming bulk of Wytham Hill. On the nightmare stretch, the busy A40, the wind was behind me, and my legs held out until the roundabout, when they went, but very little willpower was needed to get me home. The time was 81.10 – desperately slow (even allowing 10 seconds to direct a car), but at least a baseline on which, hopefully, I can only improve.

Friday 2/1/87

A brief image from yesterday's run. The day was gloomy, and a car with its lights on came up behind me as I approached a reflective signboard. The light, except where I shadowed it, reflected straight back to my eye, giving a detailed picture of twin copies of me running. The image zoomed in as the car drew closer. Brief, but still too complex for a haiku, I think.

I didn't run today. When I exercised last night, I managed to bend my knee into kneeling and cross-legged positions (using two cushions rather than my habitual one); but today the feeling in the knee was quite noticeable. We went shopping in Summertown, and I did a few exercises while I was waiting for Sheila in the car park (which worried the passers-by very much). Then, at home, I began getting some of the work done that I promised myself I'd do over Christmas – I am way behind, but not too worried, because once term starts I'll soon catch up. (How different from a year ago, I say again!)

Anyway, it wouldn't have been a very nice running day – it was very cold (the

children twice left the back door open, or it came open by itself, and the cold went right through the place from top to bottom) and bleak. The only thing worrying me is that I am encouraging habits of laziness!

Sunday 4/1/87

I'm re-reading Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men*. It's very noticeable how he, in common with other commentators on Central Asian wisdom, goes on at great length about the inner workings of the teachings. If this is really so, why don't they just present the teachings and let them go to work? Or is this pontification a plot within a plot, designed to distract the recipient's attention while the teachings really go to work? In other words, does the unconscious process work better despite (or even because of) the subject's knowledge of it?

This is on my mind because I've been running so slowly lately. Today I went to Cumnor roundabout and back, a minute slower than on the occasion of my acceptance for the London. There are some excuses. My legs were stiff after two long runs in the last three days; there was quite a strong wind (in my face on the way out); and I was still favouring my knee, though there is virtually no pain now. But is it really that my body is preparing for the speed it expects to be able to keep up for 26 miles? The pace of my last few runs has been fairly consistent at about 6.40 a mile, which if sustained for marathon distance would give a time a few minutes under three hours, my optimistic estimate of what I can do. I don't have to get any faster; just get used to being on my feet for three hours at a time. And there is plenty of time for that!

Monday 5/1/87

I started recording mileages yesterday, as from last Sunday, that being the first complete week I've had no excuse (as well as the week of the New Year). Of course, all these mileages are approximate; I have no idea how far I'm running, or whether I'm over- or underestimating. It was just done out of a sense of boredom and need to do something.

In my youth, I resisted the temptation to tot up mileages. In any case, a lot of my training then was repetitions or interval work, and total distance would have been a most unreliable guide. Second time around, there are few statistics I can keep – I compete only once or twice a year, I don't run measured distances, and I have many training courses between which I switch as the whim takes me – and I do much more steady running at close to my best for the distance, so mileages

make more sense. When things are going well, I achieve between 30 and 40 miles a week, but I'm not ashamed of anything over 20. In Sydney the March before last, helped by the weather and lack of responsibilities, I covered 320km in four weeks, 100 in the first week.

I'm recording daily, cumulative weekly, and cumulative overall totals. On paper – but I lived out my Christmas Day fantasy, so that today the computer greets me with “125 days to go! Ok”.

Tuesday 6/1/87

Today I fulfilled a dream from 9 December: I ran the Regents Canal towpath from Mile End to Little Venice.

It wasn't such a beautiful day as last time (I think beautiful days will be rare for a while); no rain, but cold and windy, the wind in my face all the way. I set out just after midday, knowing that the main obstacle would be Islington. In fact, by chance, I narrowly missed the other end of the tunnel, and then got further and further away from the canal until I struck a busy road with a high brick wall which looked like the edge of the railway yards. Fortunately I made the right decision about which way to turn, and struck the towpath at a point where I would anyway have had to cross the canal. The rest was straightforward, with varied scenery, but not quite as I'd expected: the big railway termini were scarcely in evidence at all, and that part of the towpath is almost rural! Also, Regents Park was dull, with the canal in a deep cutting. At Maida Hill Tunnel there was notice of a diversion, but a very clear footpath followed the tunnel. Soon I was back in parts familiar from my Westfield days, though these were twelve years ago,¹⁹ I knew exactly where to turn for Paddington. The Met²⁰ came along almost immediately, and though I stiffened up on the journey, running back from Whitechapel loosened me up for my shower.

Wednesday 7/1/87

There is another factor which probably contributes to my slow pace lately; that is my knee. Not that it is painful; and ignore for the moment any unconscious favouring of it. Its stiffness means that it just doesn't bend, and so I can't throw it

¹⁹In 1975 I spent a term as a temporary lecturer at Westfield College, and walked there from Paddington each day.

²⁰In those days the Hammersmith & City line was still part of the Metropolitan, and terminated at Whitechapel most of the time.

out so far, and my stride is shortened. Then the other stride automatically shortens to keep balance.

Today, too, there was an additional excuse. Even at 2pm when I went out, there was a lot of frost and ice on the ground, and the air was very cold. As I might have expected, I was puffing and panting, desperately trying to get enough air into my lungs for it to keep me going at the low rate of oxygen transfer.

I've always described this by saying that I'm not acclimatised to the cold. In the 1969 season, I slipped back in the Oxford first team as the winter drew on and the cold affected my performance. I remember the first heavy frost of the season, when we ran at Parliament Hill and I had severe breathing trouble. But it might be, or another way of saying the same thing, that my basic physiology is that of a good distance runner in the warm.

From the roundabout, the contours of Oxford were blurred (or, less negatively, softened) by the hint of mist. I thought to myself, "A Chris Andrews day!"²¹

Thursday 8/1/87

Today I seem, for a change, to have very little to say. But I am glad I ran yesterday and can indulge in the luxury of a day off. For, apart from my knee, it was not a day for running, and I couldn't have made time for it anyway. All afternoon, from 12.30 to 5.20, was taken up with the teachers' conference, sparking off thoughts about designing projects for GCSE Maths, and learning that Halley's Comet is four days late each time it comes back, and without knowing this its density couldn't be computed. The morning, after cycling with the children to school, with writing to Steve Cullinane and talking to Simon Thomas. The evening, after a terrible journey back (because of a stalled train at Baker Street, instead of being comfortably in time for the 6.07, I caught the 6.45 with 30 seconds to spare (having taken 20 minutes longer from the Department to Paddington than when I ran it on Tuesday!), greeted me with impenetrable fog and ever-thickening frost, and lumbered me with babysitting late. I managed to do one thing, which I never believed I'd either have to do or be capable of doing – proved the existence of Steiner triple systems for all parameter values, with an argument short enough that I can cram it into one page.

²¹Chris Andrews produced a series of soft-focus postcards of Oxford around this time.

Friday 9/1/87

Bitterly cold today. I didn't leave the house with the children, and as a result didn't get to London at all. But I was cold deep down, and my knee was troublesome when I went out shopping.

I spent most of the day reading Faber's book on the Oxford movement.²² So strange. Such a suspension of disbelief is required to see the logic of their position. Newman could apply the not-inconsiderable reasoning power of a Fellow of Oriel to come to the conclusion that reason is abhorrent, and blind authority to the True Church is an absolute requirement. He beats down with remorseless logic any suggestion that perhaps God is tolerant and forgiving. And I see no hint of explanation why the Early Fathers were divinely guided (even, it seems, more so than the Apostles), but all their successors down to the present have been deluded.

Why is any of this relevant? Any connection I could make would be spurious, it's just that it happens to be in my mind at present, this diary has to be filled, and the continuing cold weather drives enthusiasm for running out. I did come close to going for a run this morning, but excused myself to see if a couple of days' rest would benefit this troublesome knee.

Saturday 10/1/87

It snowed lightly last night. This morning, despite a threatening sky, we had no more snow; but the temperature dropped at lunchtime, and the slush froze solid. So, when I went out this afternoon, as well as the biting cold air, I had treacherous road surfaces to contend with, bringing memories of slips on the ice. As well, the effect of two nights after midnight can't have helped. But the main factor in a slow and depressing run was my knee, hurting more than usual.

I ran to Cumnor roundabout and back. I had wanted to go further, but there seemed no point prolonging the agony. For most of the way, my consciousness seemed centred in my knee, washed in the pain (this suggests that I made it worse than it was, which is probably true) and wiseacreing away at excuses. My overall pace was slow, and patches of ice slowed it still further. The sky showed its approval for exactly what Sheila criticises most in my standards of dress, mixing many different patterns of clouds in a remarkable sunset overlay; but it didn't help my mood. My time was my slowest ever, except for when I was virtually crippled after the '85 Witney half marathon.

²²Geoffrey Faber, *Oxford Apostles*.

So, rest makes the knee no better; but exercise makes it no worse. (After a shower it is just as ever.) So I don't feel the need for dramatic gestures of renunciation yet!

Sunday 11/1/87

I've introduced yet another statistic – my weight in kg on getting up in the morning. This is not unconnected with the fact that a pair of trousers I haven't worn for ages no longer does up, and a new pair of trousers has become very tight in the waist. (I don't think the second fact is at all significant, since they've also become very short in the leg since they were washed; and plenty of other trousers still fit me, while some are too big.) Certainly my stomach protrudes more than perhaps it should; but it isn't at all flabby. I think this is just statistics for the sake of statistics, and I'm not tempted to follow Sheila onto the Cambridge diet.

What a turnaround from yesterday: the Bladon circuit in 76.48, and no pain from my knee! It was a brilliantly clear day, with the temperature below freezing. The main handicap was breathing, especially up hills. (I nearly turned around and went home at the roundabout, I was so winded.) But after a mile or two I'd warmed up, and had no other ill effects from the cold until running into a biting wind on the A40. There was some ice to slow me (especially up the hill before the dream stretch, and a little on the A40). But running on the dream stretch was a joy, though it turned to struggle on the nightmare stretch. Under the conditions, this time is much too fast – I've only twice run substantially faster, both times when near a peak. What's going on?

Monday 12/1/87

I think running is suspended for a few days. The weather has become even colder – headlines glanced in newspapers speak of record lows – and, though there is only a light dusting of snow (to the children's disappointment), more is promised. At least, I have no qualms of conscience about skipping today. If I didn't count Sunday as the first day of the week, I'd be doing more than half of each week's quota in two days at the weekend.

This weather, in various ways, eats into useful time. Most notably, travelling time. Today, the underground to work was late because the drivers hadn't turned up to work; the underground home was late because of an "incident" at Kings Cross (I think this means that someone threw themselves onto the track in front of a train); and the train home was late because it sat for a quarter of an hour at

Reading, for reasons that were never explained. This means lots of extra working time, but less time for anything else. (I may one day get round to exercising on the train.) The other main drain on time involves thawing out frozen drainpipes (sorry, that's terrible!), up a ladder, being alternately scalded and frost-bitten.

Of course, people like Ivan Rival in Calgary run every day in far colder temperatures than this. To what extent is ability to cope with these conditions trainable? (sorry again!)

Tuesday 13/1/87

The big freeze continues. Any train journey to London is bound to involve delays of an hour or more in these circumstances.

An observation on the herd instinct this morning. I got to the station in time for the 9.03 (with a bit of hurrying). It was on the noticeboard, with no indication of timing. I waited for quite a while. Eventually they announced a 40 minute delay. Then the 8.33 to Reading came in at about 9.20, having come down the same line. Of course, I took it, intending to go at least to Didcot. But only when the announcer advised passengers to London to take it did the lemmings swarm out of the buffet and pile onto the small train.

On the same journey I managed to force the hand of fate. At Didcot, I went into the buffet and had a coffee in a china mug. As soon as I started to sip it, a train for Reading and Paddington came in. (As it turned out, I could have drunk the coffee, as the train didn't go for a while.)

I've arranged my tutorials for before and after my Friday lecture. This suggests that running on Friday won't be easy unless I stay late to do it. But, when the weather is less extreme, Monday and Thursday look possible: Monday afternoon, and Thursday, depending on the logicians, before or after my lecture.

Wednesday 14/1/87

Today (or rather, last night), the long-awaited snow came.

I've credited myself with a mile of running today. Ruth²³ didn't come in and as a result it almost slipped our minds to go up to school to fetch James. Sheila remembered at 3.00 so I put my wellingtons on and ran up to school to fetch him. In fact he was still hunting for his boots and bag when I got there at 3.05. I also went downtown shopping in the morning, and walked the boys to their choir

²³Our nanny.

lessons in Cutteslowe in the evening, so I had my share of tramping around in the snow.

If it weren't so slippery, snow would be an ideal medium for resistance work. It is quite a bit extra work getting anywhere in these conditions. But untreated roads are really lethal, and where they have been salted (or even had a reasonable amount of traffic) they are deep in slush. Untrodden footpaths are the best, though there is still the risk of putting your foot in a hole.

If this weather goes on much longer, my craving for a run will probably drive me out, gloved and hatted, maybe even anoraked. But I suppose the time off must be good for my knee (which, as usual, seems no better and no worse).

But just talking of resistance makes me crave even more the surf and sand and blazing sun!

Thursday 15/1/87

I've claimed another mile today, involving getting between Temple and Embankment stations and Kings, and up from underground at Paddington. And at any rate, even if it wasn't a mile at full effort, I've paid for it in other ways. I slipped twice, once on a manhole cover in the Strand, and once on the station forecourt at Paddington, and have given both my left hip and my right wrist noticeable bangs. Of course, it is true that my old black shoes don't have anything like the grip of running shoes; and Wolvercote is probably safer than Central London anyway.

A few days ago, we were discussing Indian classical music with John and Ros, which reminded me of my analogy, in one of my diaries, between this and distance running as a means of communication – essentially, in both cases the format is so fixed that the performer can convey emotion to the audience by very subtle variations. I suppose that the same principle holds in other places too, such as No theatre. Of course, I was thinking there of a runner in a track race in a stadium, and the crowd in the stadium. There is something of the same effect in a televised marathon, but there the television producers come between performer and audience – no television station would show the same runner slogging it out for over two hours! I don't think the effect extends very much to the internal state of the performer, but you could make such an analogy for the relationship between practice and performance (or training and racing). Also, once the similarities are granted, the differences become fascinating!

Friday 16/1/87

What a world of difference there is between John Henry Newman and Thomas Merton, despite the fact that they operate with the same data and face the same problems! Basically Merton appeals to me because, instead of trying to justify his position with flawed logic, he simply states that it is his business to be a saint, and works at that with his whole being.

His biographer touches a slightly sensitive nerve when she says that few who visit a monastery can avoid the fantasy of seeing themselves heroic in monk's habit, putting aside the world. I'm not called to do that. Just as well. The occasional meditation, even running, even mathematics or teaching, don't carry me very far on that road. But unquestionably I'm drawn to reading such books. What Merton says is so important, so true, and (thus) such common sense!

The banged hip cleared up without problem. Only the knee remains to trouble me, and I wish it wouldn't. I had a bit of a sprint to work today, when BR and LRT combined to make me ten minutes late for a tutorial. But it is cycling that keeps me from total unfitness at the moment, as it has done for many years now, throughout most of which I wasn't running at all. To the station and back is nearly forty minutes of exercise, not as hard as a run to the Cumnor roundabout, but certainly not trivial. I think that it does little for my running muscles (especially arms and legs), but helps keep heart and lungs ticking over satisfactorily. And in this week's weather, it's about all I've been able to manage.

Saturday 17/1/87

I bought a copy of *Running* magazine down town today. Sometimes I do this to keep my morale up, but at present I don't feel in need of that; I got it to see if there was a race I could enter suitably timed between now and the London. For example, Reading. But I found no mention of Reading. There was a full-page advertisement and entry form for the Abingdon Marathon and Half-Marathon. The latter is just two weeks before London. That sounds good; but each of the four half-marathons I've run so far has put me out of action for several weeks, for various reasons. (At Abingdon, I was coming down with 'flu, much more seriously than I realised; at Otmoor, it was just pressure of work and lack of incentive; and twice at Witney, the effort exaggerated some small nagging soreness.) Dare I risk it, and to in with the intention of just running at nice steady pace, aiming to finish in under 90 minutes and running easily? I think I'll sleep on it a bit longer.

It crossed my mind today that my knee may not be due entirely, or even mainly,

to that tumble. Perhaps it is caused by running, or else perpetuated by it. It hasn't cleared up in the course of this week off, but it does seem a bit better. And I've discovered a treatment it responds to – cold. Either a jet of cold water in the shower, or a cold flannel, and for a day or so it is much improved. I'll try this regularly. It would be very nice if I could clear it up entirely. It would begin to worry me if it were to go on for two months or more. But the improvement has cheered me up greatly.

Sunday 18/1/87

I didn't run yesterday, with various excuses. Sheila was out all day, and we had Robbie, so I was reluctant to leave the children. Then it takes a bit of willpower to go out after dark this weather, to say nothing of the danger from the ice.

So by today I had a powerful need for a run. I set out on the Bladon circuit, intending to go at an easy pace to cope with the conditions. There was still a lot of ice and snow. But I found that the worst part was not the single-track Bladon-to-Cassington road, as I'd feared (the snowploughs had done a good job, although in some places the snow had drifted back and subsequent traffic had compacted it into a skating-rink) but the stretch out of Bladon (where a slight thaw, lots of feet, and then re-freezing had formed a jagged crust) and the A40 cycle track (where no snow-clearing at all had been done). The latter, though very hard work, was joyous running; it was very like running on sand, since there were a couple of inches of loose snow all the way except for occasional drifts and bare patches, and so it recalled to mind some of my most enjoyable runs, most recently at Noordwijk last Easter during the gales, when after clawing my way up the beach into the wind, I turned and sprinted effortlessly for miles down the other way.

The time it took me was 80.31, but for the work (much harder than under normal conditions) it wasn't bad. The increase in time per section correlated with the amount of snow. It also included two stops to do up my shoelace!

Monday 19/1/87

Today I had the unusual sensation of being stiff! It felt to be mostly in my calves, but pushing the bike pedals around was inordinately hard work.

It must have been because of all the extra work, and the unusual modes of running, needed to cope with the ice and snow yesterday. Apart from the resistance running, in the loose snow on the cycle path, I ran with short steps on the very slippery ice, trying not to lose control; I tried long strides where it wasn't so bad,

trying to minimise the number of impacts (though it seems to me on theoretical grounds that this was probably fairly pointless); and I was perpetually having to leap on and off the road as cars came, or from one side of the path to the other seeking the least slippery patches.

Of course, a week's layoff probably contributed as well!

On the subject of thinness of the road running calendar. I'm sure it's a sign that the running boom is in decline. Another sign is a report that applications for the London were down, so that the odds weren't one in four, but one in two-and-a-half or so. So, perhaps typically, after having been so far ahead of the boom that I wasn't in it at all (peaking in 1966-7), I'm now behind the boom. With personal computers, I got one well after most mathematicians (and many others) who bought them, and by the time I had become expert, most people had either left them in a dusty corner or turned them over to the kids;²⁴ then, as I plugged away doing mathematics on it, I was overtaken by the personal word-processing boom, so that today's machines are little use to me.

Tuesday 20/1/87

Today, the thaw is well and truly under way. If you can run on the road, not too close to the edge (this applies on much of the route to the Cumnor roundabout), conditions are quite good. But, if and when you have to get off onto the edge, or the footpath, your feet slide away on the slippery slush without providing any forward propulsion.

That's what happened to me today. There was quite a thick mist; the world was white, and in my white top I was a bit worried about the unintentional camouflage. (I had dark trousers on, the classic colour scheme for camouflage in the snow; but I was thinking on Sunday that the pattern of nature then was just the reverse, with snow in the dips and ditches, but the tops of banks and the branches of trees clear and dark.) I had bouts of slipping about, but also, for the first time this season, bouts where I crossed the border between jogging and running, both out and back (especially back). So, not so surprisingly, I recorded my fastest time this season for that run, 35.45, made up as 18.12 out and 17.33 back, one of the greatest speed-ups ever.

So again the worry that I am too fit too early. It isn't really a worry now, since I feel good, everything working nicely (knee not troubling me). But moods change. Sheila has a very bad cold, and I'll be lucky if I don't catch some version of it.

²⁴I got my Sinclair Spectrum at the end of 1982.

But it is the muscles and joints which could do the most serious and long-term damage, if they chose.

Wednesday 21/1/87

My back chair came today. Sheila has had one for a week or so; I ordered her one from a catalogue, and she ordered me one from a different catalogue. Such is the way of the universe, hers cost twice as much as mine, and is wooden, padded, adjustable, and good-looking as a piece of furniture, whereas mine is basic tubular steel and canvas, black and 70s contemporary. I've used hers quite a bit since it came. It is amazingly comfortable. I haven't yet tried the concept out on a long spell of typing, but for relatively short stretches it produces no strain or ache at all. I think too that it will improve my posture; it is impossible to slouch in such a chair, and any position other than straight-backed becomes uncomfortable after a while, so it is self-correcting.

I thought today about the appeal for information for publicity purposes by the marathon organisers. What should I do? I think of myself as an ordinary run-of-the-mill applicant trying his first marathon. But, unlike many others in this position, I have a past. Perhaps it would interest them that I was a runner twenty years ago, and all the other things – if you say it quickly, so that people don't catch the middle word, Australian Universities champion sounds good, especially as it was the Ron Clarke era. (In fact I never raced against him, but I was in the same Australian Championships in Hobart when I was a junior.) But perhaps to an English audience, Oxford blue sounds more impressive. But I'm reluctant to tell them because it seems like tempting fate; so many things can go amiss between now and then.

Thursday 22/1/87

I didn't remark yesterday on having reached 100 miles since Christmas. Too many statistics provide too many causes for remark, as anyone who has listened to Test Match commentaries knows quite well!

I've lost no weight since I began weighing myself. (I've taken to recording the figure only when it changes.) But Sheila says my tummy sticks out less, so perhaps there has been some redistribution.

What I did last night was to spend some time reading material from twenty

years ago, mainly old UQAC²⁵ newsletters and my training diary. I just skipped through the training diary, reading the accounts of races (up to the climax in August 1966²⁶; it gets very depressing after that). The oft-repeated comment is that, at a certain point, I couldn't be bothered trying, maybe because I'd secured as good a place as I'd expected, or just laziness. Have I conquered this? (Of course, in my best races, no such comment occurs; if I did try, it didn't seem worth saying so.) It was fairly clear that I'd done what I did because of the heavy sessions of repetitions I did in 1964–5.²⁷ Is there a message there? I think some of my work last year on the roundabout hill was comparable.

But the main reason for searching through was looking for reading matter. I struck gold with a report on injuries by Tony Booth²⁸. He says several times that, for tendons, knees, etc., you treat with an ice-pack; avoid heat if there is any swelling. So my tentative prescription was sensible after all. One interesting question: Why do I trust this old stuff, perhaps more than advice in a magazine?

Friday 23/1/87

My first day as a veteran! I was more than usually decadent. Hester brought me coffee in bed, and I got my presents (from Sheila, a record of oboe and drum music from the Cameroons, an art magazine, and a pencil sharpener; from Hester, some incense; from Neill, a magnetic draughts set; and from James, a construction of his own making, a blockhouse from which rockets can be launched, I think). Then I had cake for breakfast (left over from Panda's party last weekend!) I missed lunch because of teaching. My Acorn NS32000 second processor was back from repair (again) and still didn't work (again!), but I finally have a working model now; Andrew Tworkowski pinched one from somebody else. As a result of trying it out, I was later home than usual. I had a beer and sandwich on the train, two glasses of wine with my pizza and salad for supper, and a glass of Grand Marnier with my dessert at the Red Lion with Sheila.

So, how does it feel? I think yesterday's comment is relevant. I've often said that this time I run for my own enjoyment, not for winning. And it is true that I do often enjoy running now, though I still don't like it to be too easy. But I don't think I feel guilty when I ease up and fail to do as well as I could have done (and

²⁵University of Queensland Athletics Club.

²⁶I won the Australian Universities Cross-Country championship that year.

²⁷I spent a lot of time running repetition quarter-miles, with short recoveries, with Tony Blue, who had won a Commonwealth Games medal at 880 yards.

²⁸UQAC coach.

there have been few competitive opportunities anyway). And certainly I don't grind myself into the ground doing repetitions. (A standard day in 1964–5 would be warmup, then 10 or 12 repetition 440s with either walk 110 or jog 440 recovery between. (I seem to remember that one kind was labelled “interval training” and the other “repetitions”; I'm not sure which is which. Was I then?)

Saturday 24/1/87

I ran up Cumnor Hill today. It's not a course I have run often; but today was the fastest I've ever done it, two and a half minutes faster than a month ago.

It was a strange run in some ways. I started off easily and so smoothly that I wanted to shout for joy as I turned right onto the footpath outside the house and rolled off down the road. The running continued smooth and even, but the first inkling of trouble occurred at Cumnor roundabout, when I looked at my watch and saw 18.27, which seemed absurdly slow. Then when I hit the hill, I really found myself struggling, though I don't think the pace dropped too much. It wasn't unpleasant, in fact rather a nice feeling of striving and succeeding. I reached the top of the hill in 31.25. Coming down the hill was a dream; I flew effortlessly along, without any painful braking or unpleasant impact effects. I expected to suffer for it; and certainly, after passing the roundabout again, the work suddenly became much harder. But without ever feeling that my reserves were empty, or putting in a last-ditch effort, I kept my stride up all the way home, getting back from the roundabout in 17.50, making it a reasonably respectable time even for that bit, and for the whole, 61.37, so a really marked speed-up, not all due to the hill!

But on the way I was struck by a sobering thought. If I wanted to do a trial of just under marathon distance, twice round the Bladon loop would be OK (about 23 miles, leaving off the “tail”); but 3 hour pace would mean 80 mins. per lap!

Sunday 25/1/87

Family dynamics. I casually asked Hester if she wanted to come for a run. Yes, she said, but not yet. Sheila decided she'd come too. Then Hester said no, she felt ill and wouldn't come.

So I set out with Sheila to Wytham. This got me started at a nice gentle pace, making a longer run feasible. I went, as yesterday, up Cumnor Hill. (How often I retrace my footsteps over an unfamiliar course – I wonder why?) Usually I struggle up to the turning point, but today I felt strong and fit as I passed it and set

off through Cumnor, down the hill overlooking Farmoor reservoir, over the toll bridge at Swinford, and up the lovely straight stretch across the Evenlode and up to Cassington Mill. On the A40 I felt stronger than ever, and got back from the bridge in nineteen minutes. The last stretch was tiring, but pleasantly so, a feeling of a job well done. And this at the end of my longest run of this spell.

The encouraging thing is that I'm still running well within my limits; this is probably the best defence against catastrophe in the next $3\frac{1}{2}$ months.

The mechanisms of energy transfer that Newsholme and Leech describe in their book²⁹ are of almost unbelievable complexity and subtlety, so that little I read there is of direct applicability. (I don't agree with Gurdjieff's Persian fakir³⁰ who says that attempts to tinker with the body always ruin it; I think the self-regulating mechanisms can cope with most tampering.) But one thing rings true. Storage of energy in the elastic Achilles tendons, they say, can reduce energy consumption by up to a quarter. Knowing what a sick joke running was when my tendons played up, I believe this. It suggests that exercise here can have great benefit!

Monday 26/1/87

After a substantial increase in my weekend mileage, I think I can have a rest day today with a clear conscience. I had an eight-day period last May, when I was trying to get fit for the Otmoor half-marathon on $3\frac{1}{2}$ weeks notice, when I ran every day – the longest such stretch I've ever had, I think – but now is not the time for that, with now $3\frac{1}{2}$ months to go until the event I'm training for. It may be worth trying some such intensive boost much nearer the time. When I ran for OUAC, they had a training camp at Merthyr Mawr just before the start of Michaelmas term. In 1969, I had a marvellous time at the camp, running up sandhills, running over golf courses and along paths overlooking the sea as well as country lanes, even plunging into the sea at the end of a hard session (this was wonderful, despite the cold water, though most people thought I was crazy.) As a result, I'd had a marvellous start to the season, running about number three in the first team, and then dropped to six over the course of the term as the weather worsened.

Why was I so much better then? Was it just that I was young enough that

²⁹Eric Newsholme and Tony Leech, *The Runner*. Eric was my colleague at Merton College, Oxford, where he was the biochemistry tutor. He died in 2011.

³⁰G. I. Gurdjieff, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*.

the training regimes didn't injure me? Was it the extra elasticity in my tendons? Or was I more strong-willed in those days? This seems unlikely, for my training diary is full of excuses, and I think I would have used the sort of aches and pains of the last few years as excuses if I'd had them. I am indeed much slower over middle distances, despite all changes. I think this slowing, for whatever reason, is as much to blame as anything; it means that over long distances I'm much closer to flat out than before.

27/1/87

Today's run was an experiment I don't feel inclined to repeat.

The story begins when I ran up the canal to Hackney Marshes last week. This involves turning off the Regents Canal along a cut called (I learned from the map) the Hertford Union. On the way back, I was suddenly faced with a junction I had no memory of on the way out. I had a moment of doubt, but took the way I thought must be right. The confirmation came when, in front of a derelict factory, I passed a group of four young people – I'd passed exactly the same group, going the other way, in front of the same factory, when I was going the other way.

Checking with the map showed that this junction was the meeting of the Hertford Union with the River Lea Navigation. It also showed another cut, the Limehouse Cut, connecting the Lea to the basin where the Regents Canal joins the Thames, yielding the possibility of a round trip. So I tried that today. But both the Limehouse Cut and the Lea below the point where BWB takes responsibility are snares and delusions: the former with a six-foot drop at one end and a locked gate at the other; the latter mostly blocked off by the gasworks and various other things. The first sign of BWB was a notice prohibiting motorcycles from the towpath! After this comes a gravelled path, then back to the junction with the Hertford Union.³¹

But I noticed that at Old Ford Lock, yet another branch leads off, giving another possibility of a loop through Hackney Marshes instead of the out-and-back of last time.

Wednesday 28/1/87

I'll never know whether it was the cold-water treatment, the lay-off the week before last, or the fact that my knee was ready to get better all by itself (or some

³¹These towpaths subsequently opened to the public.

combination of these); but today I discontinued the treatment, as there was absolutely nothing to distinguish that knee from the other after a good solid run.

I ran on the river-to-Wytham circuit. The towpath was a bit slippery (from mud, not ice – much less dangerous), but all in all conditions were much better than last week, with the sun slanting low through the trees, smoky mist on the river but not a cloud in the sky, and everywhere the bleached winter grasses (no sign of green shoots yet except in the fields of winter wheat). But I felt very sluggish. Although the pace was quite reasonable, I never really opened out, because my legs just didn't want to move any faster. Anyway, I ran it $2\frac{1}{4}$ minutes faster than last week, so I've no complaints.

The most likely explanation is that the muscles haven't quite adapted to the change in mileage from zero (Monday–Saturday, week before last) to 57 (Sunday–Sunday). I've suffered very little this time from the impact of going into quite hard training; if a bit of sluggishness at 10am is the worst, I've nothing to worry about. (In fact, that time could also be a contributing factor. Whenever in the past I've tried running before breakfast, I've left myself virtually a broken cripple after a week or so; and even mid-morning isn't my best time, unfortunately for the running of long road races!)

These times are still below my best by a long way, though – I ran it in under 50 minutes on 30/9/86.

Thursday 29/1/87

The weather forecast says a big freeze is on the way (again). We're promised -7° overnight.

Today was cloudier than yesterday, but clear and sunny in spells. I ran along unfamiliar towpaths again. Already there was a thin layer of ice over the canals; no doubt it'll be much thicker by tomorrow.

I turned right onto the Hertford Union, right again onto the River Lea (more exactly, left, over the bridge, and down the other side), and then left at the turn-off at Old Ford Lock I'd noticed on Tuesday. Troubles began almost immediately. After twenty yards, the path was quite deeply underwater where it had been washed away by a leak from the canal. I tiptoed along the concrete edging of the canal and got across. Then a branch forked off across the towpath, but a bridge carried me across. There was an invalid car parked on the towpath, with two men fishing. Then, after some very narrow and obstructed paths beside bridge supports, another fork with no crossing, and the path took me out and dumped me onto a busy road. I ran up the road and turned right. There was no access to the towpath, so I

went on, hoping to strike the main navigation channel. I did so soon enough, and to my surprise, found myself back on the bridge I'd crossed earlier. So I headed back. To lengthen the run, I detoured to do a circuit of Victoria Park. This may well turn out to be my repetition circuit. (It has a lake you can run round, on nice wide paths.)

I still feel better than I have done for a long time. It seems too good to last, if I can say that without tempting fate.

Friday 30/1/87

One hundred days to go!

Running is acting as an appetite suppressant for me at the moment, a fairly clear sign that I was eating too much before. This week, I ran at work in the lunch hour on Tuesday and Thursday, and also missed lunch today because of teaching from 11am to 2pm. Today I was hungry enough to get a snack at Paddington on the way home (though I could have done without – I weakened because our train was late), but on the other two days, I haven't felt the need for anything, and haven't even felt desperately in need of food when I got home at around 7.30.

It hasn't had the effect, though, of making me feel like eating rabbit food. (That could be due to the weather, at least in part.) But satsumas are another matter; I've been putting them away in huge quantities.

I wrote off to the Abingdon half-marathon this morning with my entry. I persuaded Sheila to enter as well, though I don't know if she'll run. I will have to restrain myself, so that I don't do any damage that can't be repaired in four weeks. Also, I think that the time has come to start introducing some repetitions into my training. If the weather would turn nice and the ground dry out a bit, I'd throw in some fartlek³² as well; the best course for that is the circuit round the university farm. The other objective is to stretch out my weekly long run to over twenty miles, and hopefully to up round marathon distance before the event.

Saturday 31/1/87

Today I saw, for the first time for years, Tower Bridge, a kind of symbol of the London Marathon.

³²Swedish for "speed play", a form of training developed in Sweden in the 1940s. It is best done in a pine forest; but I did fartlek around the landscaped grounds of the University of Queensland when I was a student.

Hester was staying with Emily for the weekend, so we took the chance to take the boys to London. It started conventionally enough, apart from public transport being very inefficient (starting at Oxford, where our train was delayed because the guard for the preceding train hadn't shown up – why can't BR say things like this in their apologies? it would liven things up). We went to the Science Museum and James got lost, and was restored to us in a tearful state about ten minutes later.

Then we went to Wapping, on the trail of a Doctor Who shop the boys had found advertising in their Transformers comic. We caught the tube to Tower Hill, from where we walked round the back of the Tower and down in front of the World Trade Centre to the corner in front of the hotel from which there was an excellent view of the bridge, dominating the scene. Should I have felt anything? – it was all just part of the wider experience. We were plunged into a series of vivid contrasts: the restoration of St Katherine's Dock; acres of demolition and new building; Wapping, with its mixture of derelict warehouses and warehouses converted into fabulously expensive flats (and even the new blocks of flats are designed to look like old warehouses); the shop itself, inside a huge warehouse with eerie stark corridors and dimly-lit fire-escapes, then finally one tiny room containing an original Dalek and the original Tardis, and very little else. James bought an empty Tardis-shaped easter egg box for a pound(!) while Neill bought two 40mm cast model daleks. The final touch was walking down the spiral staircase to Wapping station.

Sunday 1/2/87

The ring road, a long-time *bête noir* for me.

Of course, it was considerably further in the old days, when I had to run out from the centre of town to the nearest point (Marston, Mill Lane) and then back in at the end. I have a nasty memory of running it for the first time, not realising that the ring was in fact a spiral, staggering along the A34 without benefit of a path, and then going over the A40 on high stilts, having to clamber down a bank and across a field. After that, I altered the route to go through Wolvercote and Wytham (so that it goes past the front door). A bit later, I changed the pathless stretch through the back of Cowley to the suburban road (called Newman Road at the start), and later still, experimented with a change in North Hinksey which I've now abandoned. (But the roadworks there at the moment look as if they might be building an underpass!) The other unpleasantness left is between the Abingdon Road and Boars Hill roundabouts, where I must either cross the ring road, or run on the road with the traffic at my back for a quarter of a mile.

Then there are other sorts of unpleasantness – when I ate too soon afterwards and made myself sick; when I crippled myself for weeks; and when I ran into a blizzard six miles from home.

Anyway, for whatever reason, the mental anguish it causes me is much greater than for other runs of comparable length (even Hanborough, where I pulled a muscle at the furthest point once). But perhaps I'll conquer it with a few more runs like today's. I started at a lovely even pace (5 strides per breath – I had to sing "Take Five"! – and 19.15 at Cumnor roundabout) and pushed my stride out a bit around halfway, not tiring until the last couple of miles, to finish in 100.41, feeling great.

Monday 2/2/87

To continue: here, for want of anything better to write about, is a blow-by-blow account of yesterday. Thick frost on the meadow. I started off deliberately throt-tling back and, as I said, found myself taking 5 strides/breath. Past Wytham, I turned into the sun, the spectacular sight of sun behind mist rising from frost, shades of silver on silver. The best spectacle was a dead tree, partly clad in ivy, alone in the middle of an open field.

Over Cumnor roundabout and up the hill behind Westway, with a "road closed" sign and a huge crane: I half expected to be diverted. The hill as usual made me puff a bit, but once at the top it was easy again. The traffic wasn't too bad and I got over the ring road without a pause. The straight past South Hinksey went quickly. Crossing the ring road, a car exhaust popped and gave me quite a scare! Up the hill after Sainsbury's, the pace inched up a bit. I greeted a policeman on a bike watching a football game in the park.

I fantasized the pace being quite fast, but revised my estimates down when I passed nominal halfway in 54mins+. But the clock came only 22 minutes later, and I knew it to be $\frac{3}{4}$ hour from home, so I revised it up again. Still so easy. Passed a platoon of soldiers in full camouflage near the top of Shotover. No views on this stretch, and the mist had turned from silver to grey, but it was comfortable with wind and sun at my back. Then on the last stretch, tired a bit, but the miles still went quickly and without struggle.

Two runs in two days, over two of my least accurately measured courses: 6.12/mile for ca. 6 miles; 6.30/mile for ca. $15\frac{1}{2}$ miles. Most satisfactory for the time of year!

Tuesday 3/2/87

And now, with scary suddenness, I'm laid up with 'flu.

I was just the slightest but wobbly coming home; I had to rush like mad to get the 6.28, and I had to stand all the way to Didcot, where there was more than ten minutes to wait in the dank mist. I guess this didn't help. But I was much more wobbly by bedtime, so went to bed early – and then the fun started! I lay awake most of the night, burping up, fantasising, doing mathematics (and, for once, it wasn't all nonsense; I can remember what I thought about – lower bounds for the postage stamp problem, a bit further with the problem about sums of reciprocals, an outline for putting the prime power problem on the machine).

There was really no question of getting to work. I lay in bed all day, aching in all my joints and burning up, not eating anything – nobody came and I wasn't up to making myself anything – until about five in the afternoon. Then Sheila brought me tea and crumpets. The thought of it nauseated me (I craved orange juice only) but I wolfed it down and felt a bit better. Now I'm up, which says something, though just killing time until I can go back to bed.

One piece of news, from that distant era before all of this happened. There are runners at QMC. I sat next to one at lunch yesterday. She works in the library and is acquainted with several other runners as well as the existence of an East London half-marathon in late May or early June. I was vaguely thinking about Otmoor at that time of year – some organisation required there! (If and when I'm back on my feet.)

Wednesday 4/2/87

If only it would pass as quickly as it comes on!

In the night, the temperature went down. My dream fantasies concerned the incommensurability of very thin beaten metal (somehow symbolic of my recovered condition) with much thicker materials (hence, by implication, difficulties I'd encounter in the recovery). Today I still had aching joints, despite a hot bath; but I felt well enough to make myself lunch, to work, and to do some yoga and exercises. I think, though, that at least one more day off running is called for.

Sheila is keenly reading the *Running* magazine lying around the house and talking of things like the Bournemouth Bay Run. I wonder. I half fear that a half-marathon in April will prove too much for her enthusiasm. Perhaps not, though; she was certainly fired by the quarter-marathon she ran at Witney in 1985.

This afternoon I dug out a slide of Captain Cook's Cottage for Hester who is

doing a project on him. I had to go through a whole shoebox full of semi-reject slides from the period 1964–1969 to find it. That was a strange experience. Many of them were running photos, though none of them good ones. But I had a picture of the I/V CC team, Sydney 1966³³; I misread it as “my CC team”. which wasn’t so far from the truth! A lot of pictures of the Civil Liberties march, rocks on the side of Mt. Cordeaux, objects in my room; somewhat surprisingly, very little about music. Finally, I picked up a slide which jumped from my fingers out of the box; I knew without looking that it was the one, though I haven’t given any of those pictures even a casual glance for many years.

Thursday 5/2/87

Well enough for work (just), but not for running yet.

In fact the aches have almost gone, remaining only between my shoulder blades. The worst symptom has been the dizziness when I have to make any kind of exertion. So, for example, I didn’t enjoy cycling to the station, nor walking up from the first floor of the department to the third. And I certainly didn’t feel up to doing any more work than was absolutely necessary. I walked into the lecture room and with some difficulty resisted the temptation to sit down in a chair, but then someone asked a question, and answering it got me started, and the momentum kept up right through the lecture which, though not one of my most exciting, was (I think) reasonably comprehensible, and finished right on time.

Perhaps the worst bit of the day was sitting around waiting for a phone call, which hadn’t come an hour after the promised time, not up to doing anything constructive, but trying to understand how files work in Pascal!

Sheila has been going out running quite regularly in the evenings since we sent off the entry forms for Abingdon. She complains that, no matter how well or badly she thinks she’s run, the speed stays stubbornly at ten minutes per mile. To this the two answers are, first, it’s good, she can unconsciously set a pace, and second, the speed will increase with practice, almost effortlessly. I wouldn’t expect her to break 2 hours, but she could be not too far off, with luck.

Friday 6/2/87

Recovery proceeds apace.

³³Inter-varsity cross-country; that was the year I won, and the Queensland team were second overall.

That curious appetite phenomenon again. When I'm fit and running, working through my lunch hour on Fridays doesn't bother me and I can even put off eating until I get home. (Truer to say, it's not that I have the willpower to put off eating, but that the artificial food on offer repels me.) But today, I pigged out in disgusting fashion, with a small burger and chips, orange juice, and a Mars bar at Paddington before catching the train home. That was only about $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours before sitting down to (for once) a decent cooked supper of poached trout (large and rather dry), microwaved potato, and Brussels sprouts . . .

How much difference would due care and attention to my diet make to my running? Just at present this is a two-pronged question, the branch "Would it keep me healthier?" looming larger in importance than "Would it help me run faster?"

I don't think there's too much to worry about, in fact. I'm a bit short on fresh vegetables (as who isn't in February?) but eat plenty of fresh fruit, wholemeal bread, juice, a bit of protein, milk, vitamin C pills, Vegemite, etc. And the way I was feeling before being smitten down this week is a good sign that I'm basically OK. I'm not short of roughage either.

Saturday 7/2/87

At last, back on the road. And how wonderful it feels, how I'd missed it! I set out through Wytham, hoping to come back through Hinksey and up the river but prepared to turn back at any sign of trouble. But everything went well, at a nice easy jogging pace that got me to the roundabout in almost exactly the same time as last Sunday, and then getting into a slightly faster stride (especially up the river) which covered the remaining distance in almost exactly the same time as last time I ran that circuit (on 28/1/87). Inevitably I felt slightly weak, but there was absolutely no discomfort, difficulty in breathing, or elevated pulse rate; in fact, I think some good was done, clearing out the tubes, over and above getting back into training.

It had been a hell of a morning with the kids; I needed that.

While down town, I bought for the first time a copy of *Today's Runner*. A less good magazine than the others, I think; but it had an invitation to write in telling your London Marathon story. Selected contributors will be selected on a before-and-after basis, whatever that means. So I wrote off to them in Peterborough, not because I want to be in their magazine (I don't!), but simply another way to keep up my enthusiasm. When I turned on the computer to type it, it told me "92 days to go". Time has flown while I've been ill. When I'm back to strength, it's time to start repetitions and fartlek!

Sunday 8/2/87

I found myself studying maps today, searching for new training routes, new villages or scenic points that might be within reach of my increased mileage. I didn't come to any definite conclusions; but I did cover some new ground on my run, certainly a different texture from what I'm used to.

I set out as usual through Wytham to West Way. Then I carried on as if running the ring road, but instead of crossing, I followed the road round up the hill, past "Hinksey Conduit House", with some kind of conservation plaque. The hill there is a real gut-tearer, especially as it was into a brisk no-nonsense south-westerly wind and I was feeling very sluggish and uninspired. But I stuck at it. Then I came to the bridlepath. At first, it was a level path churned into deep mud by horses' hooves. Then it went down a slope past a belt of trees, and it was muddy clay, caking the shoes. Then I came up onto a firmer path, running along below the sub-alpine slopes of Cumnor Hill (Hurst Hill?) and Boars Hill. Here there was only a thin layer of mud, but my shoes gave me no grip, and I slithered about all over the place.

It was at that point that I decided that I needed new shoes. Not only have the shock-absorbing midsoles become soggy and ineffective, but also the tread has worn to the extent that even a thin layer of mud over firm gravel becomes treacherous. The magazine talks in terms of five hundred miles out of a pair of shoes; I don't know how accurate that is, but mine must have done much more than that! (Two hundred miles since Christmas; quite a long way in the summer.)

Monday 9/2/87

Rest day again. Perhaps if I get going seriously I'll be able to sustain 6 days a week. In fact it was a generally long and tiring day – the underground had two malfunctions going in (a signal failure at Great Portland Street, and a stalled train ahead of us at Faringdon); and I missed my train home by seconds because of the pro-seminar over-running by a quarter of an hour. Between it was three-quarters of an hour for lunch, a lecture, two research students, time for my advisees, and time to get the "random sum-free sets" program running. (This time I've left it cooking overnight.)

Conclusions from that map-reading yesterday – I could lengthen the ring road circuit with a detour through Horspath, Wheatley, and the Islip road; or I could run out along the east side of the ring road and back that way; I could go over Newbridge, going out by Cumnor, Eaton and Appleton and back through Stanton

Harcourt and Eynsham; I could run out to Merton village, or (in the same general direction) run round Ot Moor; and of course I could go further in the Bladon direction, e.g. around Blenheim Park. Any of these would be quite a bit longer than my usual so far. So I'm inclined to tackle first those that allow turning back. Certainly the path from Cumnor Hill to Boars Hill is out until the weather is better; but another possibility is along the road running from the top of Cumnor Hill round behind Boars Hill.

Tuesday 10/2/87

Things are almost back to normal now; all that remains is an occasional cough that comes on me at odd moments, including sometimes when I'm out running. It must look terrible to passers-by!

I went on another voyage of discovery, this time down the canal towpath to the river and then upstream along the river. Of course, there is no river path of any kind³⁴; and, that part of London being what it is, I ran mostly along narrow streets with building sites on either side. Not the most pleasant of runs; but I got more efficiently through the bit that we walked last Saturday week, to Tower Bridge. I ran over the bridge, in the teeth of a vicious southerly wind. Then I turned around and retraced my steps. The total time was about 55 minutes.

I was amazed that a bridge the size of Tower Bridge carries only one lane of traffic in either direction.

I didn't see any sign of a river path on the other side, either. I was vaguely looking for a possible loop involving river crossings at Tower Bridge and again further down – I think there's a pedestrian tunnel somewhere.³⁵

I got back in time for lunch today, after having left almost as soon as I got to work. I was quite wet and sweaty to begin with, and my usual milk and orange didn't seem like enough fluid; but afterwards, I felt no discomfort.

I really should start thinking about repetitions, or fartlek, now. Maybe tomorrow I could get started on something like that.

Wednesday 11/2/87

An inauspicious start: a slightly upset stomach and a feeling of lethargy made it difficult to start out into the cold drizzle. (In another year I might have skipped

³⁴This was before the creation of the Thames Path.

³⁵At Greenwich.

running.) When I did get going, I felt very sluggish. I didn't really feel like the roundabout hill, so I ran to Wytham and did the hill there, up to the car park.

I had envisaged about three but in the end I did five. It's quite a fierce hill after a gentle introduction, so I started at a comfortable stride and quite soon found myself struggling. (In the third one I wheezed a bit – message from departing cough.) My pulse at the top was up a bit; I didn't time it, but not over 120, I think. I recovered very quickly, almost as soon as I'd launched myself back down the hill. After the session, I came home at a nice easy stride.

I think it was a good session which did achieve something. Despite the conditions and the poor start, I felt good for that.

As often with repetitions or hill work, the mileage doesn't reflect the session; one has to keep on guard against curtailing these sessions in favour of long runs just to get the mileage up. But they are so enjoyable that I'll probably do them anyway!

After lunch I went to Supersports for a new pair of shoes, having even noticed a bit of slippage on the hill today. Andrew Tollett³⁶ was the assistant; he wasn't terribly clued up, but the first pair he showed me (Nike Windjammers) were so comfortable I bought them anyway (10% off). They may be slightly on the large side. Report later, when I've tried them.

Thursday 12/2/87

Following up yesterday, I ran repetitions in Victoria Park, Hackney, today. (This park is advertised in one of the running magazines as the start of the East London Half Marathon.)

I ran over there and did 6 repetitions of roughly $\frac{4}{5}$ lap, jogging the remaining $\frac{1}{5}$ lap. This worked out at roughly 3mins 40 secs per lap. Of course, it was much shorter recovery than yesterday, though the effort distance was smaller. There's a beautiful wide straight down which I finished, pouring on the effort. I think it was quite a solid session, though a short one (with one warmdown lap and running there and back, it wasn't much over forty minutes). I had the sensation that, if I continue with this sort of training on a regular basis, my fitness will improve out of sight.

Cycling home afterwards, I could feel just a little bit of stiffness in my legs. Otherwise, I felt great.

³⁶The son of our former baby minder.

I'd worn my new "NO ENTRY: please take the first turning on the right" sweatshirt that Sheila gave me – possibly an appropriate message in view of my adventures on the Limehouse Cut and other towpaths, but it provided great amusement to a couple of girls in the park, who obviously read the message quite differently. It is long enough in the arms, a pleasant change, but still very tight around the neck and wrists. The colour scheme goes well with my new shoes, but I didn't wear them. They'll be tried out on a straightforward run near home, probably on Saturday, I think. If they work well, I'll treat them lightly to begin with, trying to keep some life in them for races.

Friday 13/2/87

Come Friday the Thirteenth, a mostly unremarkable day, I'm a little stiff in the hamstrings from two days of repetitions, but nothing serious. It was a fairly busy day at work, but unlike usual, I didn't have to miss lunch. My one o'clock tutorial group sent one representative along to explain that they were flat out trying to get a cubic spline program to work and so were too busy for a tutorial; and anyway, there wasn't any knowledge for which they were currently thirsting. The food was somewhat depleted when I got over to the SCR at 1.20, but I contented myself with my usual – sandwich, milk and orange, then coffee, with a kit kat (small size) as a treat or celebration of the fact that I had made it through the week with not too many missed lunches (only Thursday).

Sheila won't be running Abingdon after all. She has to work that day; and she knew it when I sent off the application form and the money, but didn't bother to tell me. But the implications go beyond that. It means I have to arrange babysitting for the children and transport for myself to the start of the race, back from the finish to the start, and then home again – or else abandon the idea of running it myself. It may come to this, if the organisation proves too much for me.

She's now thinking about the Bournemouth Bay half marathon, which is only two weeks before London, so I'd be cast in the role of babysitter for that.

Life isn't easy. I suppose I knew that anyway; I must have temporarily forgotten.

Saturday 14/2/87

My 1969 training diary came to light this morning while I was tidying up. Even though I was then well past my peak, it still puts my present performances in their place. I grumbled if I ran slower than about 5.20/mile in a cross-country race –

taking 42.09 for $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles in the Blues match, less than a week after having 'flu, earns a long string of derogatory punctuation marks. And I could run the ring road in 100 minutes, after running out from the centre of town (and before running back again).

I suppose it was partly because of this, and partly because I'd worn my new shoes for the first time, that I set out quite fast, Actually it was faster than it felt; I seemed a bit flat-footed to begin with. I don't fly in those shoes like some new shoes I've had, although they were reasonably comfortable. I think I'll have to change my stride a bit, or else break the shoes in a bit, before I get the best out of them. Anyway, I got to the roundabout in 17.46, aiming for Cumnor Hill. Going up the hill, I really felt the strain, but managed not to let the pace drop much, even get my stride out on the second (gentler) hill, getting to the top in 30.42. Once I'd got my breath back, running down the hill was effortless, 42.40 at the roundabout. Then I tired a bit, but pushed up the work rate, so that I came home a bit faster than I'd gone out, finishing in 60.14. Being quite tired, I did a bit of jogging to warm down.

Not only is this my fastest by quite a bit for that course (although not a course I've very often run), but also, if you add the two home-to-roundabout sections, you get 35.20, my fastest this season and quite respectable in the absolute.

So you see, it is easy to ignore the evidence of 18 years ago, and judge today's performance by last month's standards, if it is more encouraging to do that!

Sunday 15/2/87

A long run worthy of old times!

I set out for Islip, intending to decide whether to run to Merton or around Ot Moor. I knew that the stretch past Kidlington would be unpleasant, but with the choice of busy highway or soft verge, I chose the latter; it was soft and uneven, the mud slightly firmed by frost. Things looked up when I reached the Islip turn, small country roads through very open fields with sun pouring down on frost and hazy hills in the distance.

Then I remembered I hadn't turned the oven on. I decided to look for a phone box in Islip and phone Sheila. But there wasn't one (unless it was down by the bridge), and I wouldn't have got her anyway; she'd gone walking in the University Parks.

The next section was the best, and I was running well, evenly, effortlessly, at I'm sure well under 7min/mile pace. But time was getting on, so I decided in favour of Merton. It's a plain village, oldish and new houses of undistinguished

sort, no “big house”, a nice plain church, and that setting amid dead flat fields – it must be very bleak sometimes.

I turned back at the church and decided to make a loop of it, going back the other way, via Charlton and Oddington. At Oddington, I took the bridlepath to Noke – a couple of huge puddles, then firm gravel until the gravel road turned into a field and left me on a long stretch churned up by horses. I passed a girl on a horse – I’d seen her before, between Islip and Oddington, and this time she confirmed the route to Noke for me. A wrong turning in Noke, then the absolutely disgusting footpath through Prattle Wood. It was so muddy, and so churned up by horses, that I had to keep going hard lest I sink right into the mud and never get out. Exhausting. But, back on the road through Woodeaton, I picked up speed nicely, as if nothing had happened. I decided to take another short cut, through Sescut Farm. This was also muddy, though not quite so bad. That road dumps you on the ring road about a quarter of an hour from home. The rest was easy!

The run was about 20 miles, at 7min/mile pace overall, including all the dreadful mud. I didn’t feel at all bad on finishing. A good omen surely? And what a beautiful experience!

Monday 16/2/87

Today was the anniversary binge of the School of Mathematical Sciences, a short-standing tradition (the third).³⁷ A very good tradition, in my opinion; it seems very important to me that money should be spent in this way, on activities which make the department more cohesive and more congenial. I’ll bet that the return in theorems-per-pound from the cost of the free tea in the afternoon is greater than that on, say, an extra library book. I think that Ian Roxburgh’s³⁸ priorities are very sensible. The other thing, of course, is people. We are right to be proud of getting three of the 15 SERC³⁹ fellowships, and to advertise this fact.

It was a very nice occasion too. I lectured at 3.30, and Malcolm MacCallum at 5.00. Without having planned it, we switched roles; I talked about my experiments on sum-free sets, phrased in terms of spectroscopy and the uncertainty principle; while he touched on Galois theory and Hilbert’s Tenth Problem as well as the

³⁷The anniversary celebration consisted of two lectures by new or newly-promoted members of staff, followed by a dinner. I was new, Malcolm MacCallum had just got his chair.

³⁸Founder of the School of Mathematical Sciences at Queen Mary College, and head for over ten years.

³⁹Now EPSRC.

differential geometry, with the physics left for a footnote at the end.⁴⁰

Anyway, it was a well-earned rest day. I am still elated by Sunday's run going so well. There was not the slightest trace of after-effect – no stiffness, no tiredness. I had to cook the Sunday lunch from scratch and then eat it when I got back; that sounds like a recipe for disaster, but I was quite OK. What might it have been if all on good road? I must have lost quite a few minutes mudlarking!

Tuesday 17/2/87

The ultimate in craziness. As the train passed Slough, I got up from my seat, walked down to the toilet, and changed into my running gear, stowing my clothes and shoes back into my rucksack. Then, at Paddington, I went in the direction of the Metropolitan line as usual, but went up the little flight of stairs, and with my rucksack on my back, started off running to work.

I had vaguely thought it would be a soft way of covering the miles; but I'd forgotten the weight of the rucksack. When I finally got it off my back in the dressing room, I could hardly lift it. It wasn't an easy run at all. I had to lean forward to balance, and the natural effect of that was to make me run faster; it became a real endurance test. The few uphill, for bridges or roads or where the canal went through tunnels, almost brought me to a halt. The ultimate strength training would be Wytham hill with a rucksack on my back. Didn't one of the British runners of the 50s and 60s, Bruce Tulloh perhaps, train across ploughed fields with a rucksack full of stones on his back?⁴¹

Having done it in the reverse direction, I knew where to go, more or less, notably through the gate rather than over the lock at Camden Lock. I also found a direct route over Islington hill. I only missed the canal by a hair's breadth the other time, and then went miles out of my way before I found it again.

Curiously, my mental map of Victoria Park is quite wrong. I looked at it on the A-Z and saw that I'd totally misinterpreted the directions, and that what I've seen of it is much less than half. Having seen both inside and outside, I'd correlated them quite wrongly.

⁴⁰Our titles were "Sum-free sets – an experimental science?" and "Old solutions from new: equivalence for space-times and differential equations". Nominally I was the pure, and Malcolm the applied, mathematician.

⁴¹Not sure; possibly Gordon Pirie.

Wednesday 18/2/87

I didn't really mean to skip running today. It was the first time for quite a while that I've missed a day on which I did intend to go out, without something standing in the way.

It was for a somewhat complicated network of reasons. I was very tired, after a combination of some hard runs and the late night on Monday (I've still run further than I had by Wednesday last week, almost entirely because of Sunday's effort). I had a lingering slightly grumbling stomach. I had to be down town in good time to book a hotel in Boulogne for Sheila and Hester.

And so I could go on. But underlying all this was the thought, no heroics! It's still terribly early days. When I was an undergraduate, between the track and field Inter-Varsity in May and the cross-country Inter-Varsity in August there was time to let myself go to pot, then begin my winter build-up from scratch, and still bring myself to a peak. That is the amount of time I have between now and London. And all my previous experience, without exception, indicates that I can't keep myself in hard training for much more than the time I've already had since Christmas. So the future involves balancing on a knife-edge between going over the top or falling short. I think that a rest today is probably the right thing to do.

It was alternately clear and cloudy, but all the time quite bitterly cold. This didn't help the enthusiasm to run. But that's a sign of weakness; I must get used to running, with or without enthusiasm. And I think I'd have enjoyed Wytham hill, once I started.

Thursday 19/2/87

Today I did penance for yesterday with a good session of repetitions. The same circuit as a week ago, in Victoria Park, but I did 8 instead of 6, and (in my new shoes) I ran faster.

Snow was falling most of the time during the session. Occasionally it was blowing hard, but mostly it was just drifting down. That sounds better, but since I was moving faster than the snow, I got it in the face whatever direction I was running. Despite the snow, the park was quite well populated – a woman with her two small children, one howling in a pushchair; another feeding the ducks on her household scraps; another sitting in the shelter out of the snow; an old man with beer and sandwich, standing in the open by a table; a mounted policeman riding by; several runners; a man with a metal detector (I thought at first he was a gardener). One pair of runners gave me an encouraging measurement of my pace

– I ate them up finishing a repetition down the straight, but they didn't gain on me during my recovery.

I took my pulse immediately after the eighth repetition – it was 144. This is probably about as high as it should go. But I was feeling the effect of fatigue in my leg muscles (all that lactic acid, all those protons!) in a way that was familiar from way back, but that I haven't experienced this season.

Perhaps as a result, I felt very good after a hot shower. My muscles have really been used today!

Friday 20/2/87

My gut, which has been grumbling for a week or so, erupted today, very messily. But I didn't feel specially bad or have a tummyache or anything. I don't really understand what's going on. You'd think that I'd be most vulnerable when running, but that hasn't given me any trouble at all. Neither has it slowed me down. Very likely, my irregular lunches don't help. Today, for example, I bought savoury eggs, chocolate milk and fruit from the shop near work and ate it on the tube on the way home. Perhaps there was something amiss with the savoury eggs!

In the longer term, things are good. My knee has entirely cleared up, with no sign of a relapse – perhaps the water torture did the trick, or perhaps it was just ready to heal in any event – and, touch wood, no injury has appeared to take its place. It is true that, whereas last term I was terrifically busy and got all sorts of things moved off my desk, this term has been much less productive. Part of the reason for this is the computer sitting on my desk – it is enormously frustrating that I can neither draw a line on the screen or write a file to disc; I've tried every variant on the commands given in the manuals, each attempt involves collating information from many different places, none of them works – but also, I feel more tired, washed-out, bad-tempered, etc. than I did last term, though still less than at Merton. But this week I've got the impression that things are looking up again. It may well be just simple February depression. It has been a good winter in terms of sunshine, but winter is winter for all that, and always affects me this way.

Saturday 21/2/87

Today's run took away all the exhilaration of the last week or so, and all the daydreams about how easy it was going to be this time.

I ran the Bladon circuit. This was partly because I wanted to convince myself that 12 miles at reasonably fast pace could be done casually, just going out and doing it, without mental anguish; and partly because I thought I was fit enough for a fast time. The state I was in at the roundabout disabused me of the second notion. The wind, cold, cutting, and often carrying sleety drizzle, was in my face all the way out to the Bladon roundabout. It was hard labour, and even when I turned out of the wind, I was breathing faster than I should have been. I passed Bladon church in 35.55.

The dream stretch, though, was beautiful. I strode out and, effortlessly, reached the bridge in 57.15. Then I was running into the wind again. That slowed me, but I kept the workrate up and came home in 75.10.

Looked at rationally, there's nothing wrong with that. It's easily my best this season and third best ever, much faster than the pace I need for London; and bringing up 50 miles in a week that included a 20-miler with mudlarking and a 10-miler with rocks on my back (if not in my head), it's not so surprising that I was a bit flattened. Conditions weren't ideal; for the 74.09 last August, I wrote, "A mild day, cloudy sun, breeze against me on the way out", and later comments made it clear that that run hurt more than this one. My pulse dropped to normal very quickly after stopping.

It just feels disappointing, that's all.

Sunday 22/2/87

A tour of Oxfordshire villages, showing my predilection for repeating a route just done. Starting just after 10.00, I ran out through Yarnton, Begbroke (I was trying to run at 7min/mile pace but was a minute and a half ahead of schedule at the Bladon roundabout), Bladon (by then I'd seen eight other runners, two going the other way and I'd overtaken all the rest), Blenheim Lower Park (where I passed ten people being exercised by a coach-cum-sergeant-major, with three extras to hold their coats), Combe (that most lovely of villages, with its old stone, its brick walkway behind the houses on the main street, and its unity of style), the Evenlode (in its lovely wide flat valley beneath high banks, overflowing with birdsong and a feeling of peace that soaked right into me), East End, Freeland (one of the most suburban of villages, where I saw someone looking just like Jim driving a big car out of a side street of small ugly modern houses), Church Hanborough (much nicer, with the view of the church seen from the bottom of a steeply-sloping open field, and even the new houses blending in much better, and two girls very self-conscious on their somewhat recalcitrant horses), then onto the cycle path by the

A40 (bypassing Eynsham and Cassington) and then a bit more mudlarking when I opted for the last stretch on the canal, being fed up with the traffic.

On the map I made it just short of 20 miles, in just under 2.18; so it was 7min/mile including the squishy bits, and making no allowance for a wrong turn by the Evenlode. An OK performance considering I was quite definitely stiff after yesterday.

Monday 23/2/87

Yesterday's run was actually further than I'd intended. I'd looked at the map to make sure of a couple of details, for example the footpath from Combe to East End, and the fact that in Freeland you turn left at the chapel, just after the church on the right – the church has a tower with a ridge roof, the chapel was just coming out with the pavement solid with small kids, many on bikes – but I hadn't measured the overall distance, just taken a rough impression of it as around seventeen miles. On the basis of that, I'd estimated a time of about two hours.

For all that it was further than intended, slightly faster than last Sunday, and begun when I was a bit stiff, I felt even better after it than last week. I had to cook the dinner entirely single-handed this time, Sheila and Hester having left for Boulogne about the same time as the boys for choir and me for Combe (having put the chicken on auto-timer this time!) After lunch, I went to bed while the boys watched East Enders, but that was just an indulgence; I cycled down to Evensong at St Giles'. (Sadly, after that effort, they didn't sing an anthem.)

I'm well ahead of schedule. I'd been aiming at six hundred miles, and I'm halfway there in just over eight of the twenty weeks. Recently I've been uneasy once or twice about overdoing it; I'd never have thought this twenty years ago, but time does make a difference to one's ability to cope. But hard work now is bound to pay off. The best possible scenario is that, in a month or so, my performances will start improving with little effort. It's a nice dream, and more practical than that I can bring out a really good performance now. But being consistently able to run twenty miles at my intended pace after a hard effort the day before is encouraging.

Tuesday 24/2/87

I tried the same Tuesday craziness as last week, but slightly better organised. Yesterday, I took a change of clothes to work, and left them in my office. (The underclothes were in fact unnecessary; I wasn't *that* well organised!) I also left

all but the most essential papers at work. This morning I dressed in running gear and track suit and put my coat over the top to cycle to the station, but once on the train, put it too in my rucksack. So, when I left Paddington, I had only a couple of papers, keys and money, underclothes, towel, shampoo and anorak on my back; oh, and shoes, but I took sandals, much lighter than regular shoes.

So the journey itself was easier going than last week. It was cold, with very light snow near the end; I ran a bit faster, but was held up for quite a long time at Islington by traffic lights. (I wish there was an easier route there!)

The journey was mostly uneventful. By starting later, I saw four runners and many more BWB⁴² workmen than last time. Just after Victoria Park, a policeman begged my pardon – two of them were riding along the towpath on their huge heavy horses and didn't hear me asking for passage for a while. Once past them, my heels sprouted wings – could that have been unconsciously connected with the fact that both policemen carried truncheons in their holsters (?scabbards?) and wore helmets?

Then, after my shower, I had clean underwear, but put my track suit and anorak on to get back to my office, where I changed and was still in time for lunch before the seminar.

On the way, I had a bit of ache from my other (left) knee. There was no chance of cold water treatment – high fixed showers and communal temperature control (a roomful of people wouldn't appreciate cold showers) – but it seems quite better now.

Wednesday 25/2/87

I really am less concerned about times at the moment. It may not seem like it, reading over all my agonising over mins/mile and so on; but the amount of agonising just demonstrates my ambivalence! I know when the running feels good. I run standard timed courses much less often (last Saturday being the exception that proves the rule). For the longer distances, this is because there is so much choice if I want to go out and run 20 miles on the road that I'd be very unlikely to repeat a course.

Today's run wasn't very fast, but I felt overwhelmed with joy as I ran. I set out to do Wytham hill. It was a still, frosty morning; blue in mid-ground, shading to grey in the distance, the effect of smoke and sublimated frost, no doubt. I ran the hill six times. The first five were steady, but on the sixth, I went a little faster and

⁴²British Waterways Board.

really knocked all the stuffing out of myself. I was out for about 54 minutes.

The woods are perceptibly greener now. I was trying to decide why, and came to the conclusion that it was the moss. (Shades of that Wizard of Id cartoon where the long-term prisoner in the dungeon says to Rodney that spring is on the way, he knows because the mold in his cell is beginning to green up.) There is no sign yet of new green shoots. Perhaps, also, as the dead leaves fall and decay, the evergreens show through more clearly. I noticed some rushes or coarse grass in the ditch beside the road that I hadn't seen before.

So the dreaded February is nearly over, and things are still going well. I'm sure that part of today's joy was because the sun shone – a good omen.

Thursday 26/2/87

To reinforce yesterday's comment, today, when I started off, I forgot to set the stopwatch running.

I ran 8 repetitions in Victoria Park again. This week, rather than snow, I ran in the rain; drizzle when I started, but intensifying steadily as I went on until it was quite a respectable soaking at the end. But it was just as well I ran then; when I got back to Oxford on the train, it was pouring down, with quite a strong wind as well, the archetypal filthy night. If I'd postponed running until I got home, I wouldn't have gone.

I was thinking as I set out that, although I'm doing no more than three consecutive days at the moment, I've had quite a good stretch of running at least every other day; since I had the 'flu three weeks ago, in fact, and before that, two weeks since the freeze-up. These are probably as good spells as I've had.

The session itself was a good one. I didn't run the repetitions terribly fast, though I did stride nicely down the straight (and fantasized myself running a two-miler on the track, coming again and again into the finishing straight). But I did the recoveries faster than last week, running rather than jogging them. This seems more important, the real point of the exercise. Perhaps I should build up to running eight laps non-stop.

There really is little nicer than stepping into a decent hot shower after a run. Our piddling little shower at home just doesn't bear comparison. Arranging use of those showers for myself was a very good move. Can one quantify it – how many minutes off my marathon time is it worth?

Friday 27/2/87

Waking pulse rate 40; waking weight, 78kg.

Now to skip to the other end of the day. When I got home, after 7pm, and had eaten my supper (overdone lamb chops and yoghurt), Hester wanted to go for a walk, so we walked out to Wytham and back. The night was full of extraordinary effects of car headlights in the fog, in our faces, over our shoulders, chasing along the ring road, lighting up trees and telephone poles. In the dark I walked in a few muddy puddles; but I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

It had been a disastrous day on the underground, after a brilliant start when the Cathedrals Express got to Paddington in 48 minutes. On the Metropolitan line, we were greeted by an announcement that trains were now running again following an earlier points failure at Aldgate, but that they would be subject to delay. In fact it wasn't too long until one came, but at Edgware Road it stopped for good and they bundled us off onto the Circle line. I decided to go round to Tower Hill and take the District line back. It would normally have been a good decision, but as it happened the District line was delayed as a result of a signal failure at Earls Court! It was only because the train had gone so fast that I got to work on time. Then, coming back, five District line trains went past with no sign of a Metropolitan, and by then I wouldn't have caught the 5.00 train even had one come, so I went to Embankment and changed there, and took the 5.27 instead. Then, back in Oxford, I couldn't find my bike for about five panicky minutes. And, having found it, I had a parcel to deliver in town.

Yet, even after all this, I could still consider the possibility of running when I got home!

Saturday 28/2/87

So soon after my comments about indifference to time, I go and do my most often-timed course in my fastest time ever!

It followed a morning of laying carpet. As often in this situation, my muscles were warmed up, and I had various accumulated frustrations to run off. Also, the day being mild (and having been sunny earlier), I went out in just T-shirt and shorts, and as a result I felt so liberated from winter's grasp that I took off at a terrific pace, so fast that I was soon puffing and panting. In fact the sun wasn't shining, and there was a fair breeze, against me in the first and third quarters. But I just went and went; it wasn't until coming into Wytham on the way back that I began to feel fatigued. I'd reached the roundabout in 16.50, and though I was

aiming for under 35 minutes at the start I decided then that I'd probably get close to 34. But in spite of the fatigue, I got the pace up a bit and came back 25 seconds faster, to finish in 33.15, or 10 seconds better than my previous best.

If that really is 9km, this time is about 5.55 per mile, and the sobering thought is that I ran that far that fast for the first half of the Witney half-marathon last year, and proceeded to drop only 10 or 15 seconds/mile on the second lap. But, if anything, that shows the difference between training and racing. If you take my speed for the Bladon circuit (just under half a marathon) and extrapolate by the same kind of factor, you get a marathon time of about 2hrs 47mins. Grossly optimistic, of course – but 3 hours doesn't look so crazy on the basis of this calculation, especially allowing for me to get fitter in the next couple of months. Anything is possible, as long as things remain good. Over half the time is gone, and the risk of peaking early is receding.

Sunday 1/3/87

This week's tour of Oxfordshire villages was quite different to, and slightly longer than, last week's. With a touch of sentiment – we concluded the sale of the boat to Derek Tollett yesterday⁴³ – I ran over Newbridge. I decided to go clockwise, so as to get Cumnor Hill out of the way first, though I thought from a cursory glance at the map that the bridge was less than halfway (it wasn't). It had been pouring with rain, but by the time I'd got the chickens prepared (the Pedders were coming to lunch) it had stopped. So it was Wytham, Cumnor (easy up the hill), Eaton (the road on the crest of a ridge, overlooking the Thames valley, with green grass in the foreground, slate trees and hedges behind that, and smoky blue on the horizon), Appleton (the most characterful village I know – and hereabouts I found four mile markers on the road, and timed myself at 6.42, 6.42, 6.40 between them), tiny Netherton, Longworth, down the main road to Newbridge in 82 mins, across Thames and Windrush, bypassing Standlake (through a country of dead straight roads on causeways and dead straight ditches, obviously prone to flooding in former times), Stanton Harcourt (with that wonderful view of Pope's Tower behind the old cow bails), Sutton (twice – the road and village bend different ways), Eynsham (through the jumbled old town centre rather than the industrial estates), and back on the A40 (where again I decided the muddy towpath was the

⁴³We had a boat for a time, moored at Medley Boat Station; but the children joining choirs put paid to the possibility of weekend cruises. One of the few trips we did take was up the Thames to Newbridge.

lesser evil, though this time I think I was wrong about that). About 2hrs 40mins all told. On the map I made it 23 miles (just over), but in view of the three timed miles and the fact that I put on a spurt after Newbridge and didn't slow until nearly to Eynsham I think it may have been more. I did slow at the end, but I'm sure that in a race I could have kept going for another three miles; so that run itself is virtually a three hour marathon. This weekend has been even better than last. Afterwards, I had no trouble with a walk to Wytham, and even carried Laura on my back for part of the way!

Monday 2/3/87

A letter of rejection from *Today's Runner* came today. I shouldn't really be disappointed, since this is after all what I wanted. The excuse is that acceptance would have been a great psychological help – with all of that publicity, it would be harder not to go out training despite appalling weather, or the lateness of the hour, or to drop effort or even walk in the last six miles of the race.

But the letter itself was unpleasantly effusive – “hundreds of letters, all of them worthy”, “let us know when you have more running stories to tell” (they don't understand that there is only one story that I could ever have to tell, and it isn't yet finished), and a final, personalising sentence added to the form letter trying to persuade them that I should write and tell them if I get under three hours. I shan't do that. (I don't believe for a moment that they expect me to.) Writing afterwards isn't going to help me get under three hours on the day; and, if their motivation is commercial, they can understand that mine is purely towards running. After all, it is I and others like me who keep them in a job.

This sounds very bitter, but it's really just a distillation of my slightly negative feelings on receiving such a letter, so as to put them more effectively behind me.

Today we are lashed by gale force winds. Almost the first thing Sheila said on waking up was, “You wouldn't have done twenty-three miles today.” The weatherman promises us only one windy day, and then much colder with rain or (more likely) enough snow to cover. What price the canal run tomorrow?

Tuesday 3/3/87

My usual Tuesday jaunt. This time, against the bitter weather, I wore another jumper under my tracksuit top. Still the organisation isn't perfect, I forgot my belt, and spent the rest of the day wandering round with my pants falling down – but at least my track suit bottom didn't fall down, after Sheila's repair job on the

elastic. She's also put a little key pocket into my top, but that is more for warmer weather, when I can bear to go out without a track suit bottom. (That would have been suicide today.)

It was an uneventful run. There was an icy wind against me most of the way, but for isolated moments I was actually rinning rather than jogging or plodding. (Perhaps this just means that for the rest of the time I was plodding.) I found a slightly better route through Islington, past a street market.⁴⁴ I heard a rusty pulley on a building site singing the most wonderful tune – I wish I could have recorded it. I didn't see any policemen this time, and was too early for most of the runners and BWB workmen. I reached my "finish line" just off the towpath in 57.20, and the Students Union building in just a shade under an hour.

But the really exciting news today is that I've proved one of my conjectures on random sum-free sets. After spending several days getting more and more tedious estimates for the case 2 and 3 mod 5, I tried to use my earlier result on 1 mod 2 to do this. It failed, because one of the inequalities went the wrong way. But then I noticed that if, instead of trying to bound $p_n - p_{n+1}$ above, I try instead to bound p_n below. the inequality is the right way round, and the proof works sweetly for any complete sum-free set mod m , for any m .

Wednesday 4/3/87

Jeanne Pedder's reaction on Sunday, on learning that I was in the London Marathon, was, first, it always makes her cry, watching the cripples struggling bravely on, and, second, what are you going to wear?

Today I'm in Birmingham. Leaving home was somewhat chaotic. Ruth phoned to say she was sick and couldn't come in; so Sheila had to chase up other arrangements for the children after school while I attended to the washing machine, still puddling all over the floor. Thus I was late leaving hime and had to go like mad through the snow to get down to the station in time for my train. I wonder how many minutes off my marathon time all this cycling is worth? It certainly stood between me and total unfitness for most of my fourth decade.

No chance to run today. (Not quite true; but I didn't want to run the risk of losing everyone when they set out for dinner.) Instead, a busy programme of talks, including mine, last in the day; and, for the minimal preparation it had, and the unevenness of fit between it and the rest of the conference, it went remarkably well. The rest was good expositions of buildings from Mark Ronan and Thomas

⁴⁴Chapel Market.

Meixner, and much more technical and less motivated discussion of some special parabolic systems by the Manchester contingent.

I'm still over the moon about my theorem, sitting in lectures doing calculations instead of paying attention. There are two "fundamental constants" in terms of which everything is explained. The mathematical high beats the running high any day (see Knuth, *Surreal Numbers*).

Thursday 5/3/87

Yesterday ended, not with a run, but with quite a deal of drinking – beer at the Staff Club, Cyprus wine at the Acropolis (or Necropolis as Jan insisted on calling it), back to the Staff Club for whisky, and then bourbon at Jenny's house, just brought back from the States (she was at the Southeastern Conference last week). It was closer to 1 than 12 when I got back to the Wentsbury. I slept very soundly and woke up at 7 (without an alarm, of course). Then I did it, though until the last moment I wasn't at all sure I'd have the fortitude. I got up and ran for three quarters of an hour.

I did ten laps of the huge long playing field at the University (probably close to 1km per lap). I just started off, and ten seemed a reasonable number. I did a little pace variation (some good striding down the long straight), but they weren't in any sense repetitions. By the eighth, I was beginning to tire, though the thought of stopping didn't really occur. But then another runner came on ahead of me, giving me something to chase. In just over half a lap, I'd virtually caught him, but then he turned off and went away. But I'd gained momentum, and I put in a fast last lap. A good session, which should have sweated the alcohol out.

Understandably I was tired for the rest of the day. There is a dull ache in my left knee, and I'm hoping it won't develop. Odd, that it should come on after my first session on grass (though it was muddy grass, and hard going). But there were no other ill effects.

Even more tired after travelling back to Oxford on a late train. The weather shows signs of worsening again; when I ran, it was at its most pleasant of the week.

Friday 6/3/87

And today, I'm very tired, as a result of the conference. The kind of tiredness where, in the middle of giving a tutorial, I forget what I'm talking about, and have to backtrack a bit and start again.

Public transport worked well on the way in, and got me there before 10.30. Then Carol Whitehead phoned up about my paper for the BCC⁴⁵ and we talked about this and that, and then my first students were banging on my door and I had to give a tutorial without having prepared it at all. Then after my lecture, a couple of people came with questions, so I was late for the second tutorial; and after that, I had to sort out the mess because the examinations section had sent letters to two of my advisees telling them that their examination forms hadn't been received yet. (When I phoned them up and they checked, they said, oh yes, we do have them, but they refused to write to the students and acknowledge their mistake! I was quite annoyed by this.) By this time I'd had enough, so, leaving the computer working out the second "fundamental constant" that appears in my existence proof, I headed for home, taking a few eatables from the supermarket.

Fortunately I'd allowed plenty of time to catch my train. The Met line train pulled in to Farringdon to be greeted by the announcement "All change! All change!" They deigned to tell us that a train was stuck at Baker Street – but how do you escape from Farringdon?⁴⁶ I crossed over and took a Circle line to Moorgate, whence I got the Northern line to Elephant and Castle(!) and the Bakerloo to Paddintgon, taking about 15 minutes longer for the journey than if there had been no delay, and easily getting the 16.20. I doubt that I'd have done so well if I'd waited.

When I got home it was snowing very hard. I'd had some thought of going out to make up for missing yesterday, but coming in wet through, I abandoned the idea. Oh, well.

Saturday 7/3/87

We awoke to find a couple of inches of snow on the ground. It continued to snow lightly all day, but the flakes were at melting point and little more settled. I had to take the children to town and bring them back, as Sheila was having to fill in for one of her tutors who was snowed in near Gloucester and couldn't get to his tutorial.

But when I did get to go out for a run, at about 4.30, I was amazed by how clear the pavements were. Even little country roads and footpaths looked as if they'd been swept, though there was quite a depth of snow on the grass right

⁴⁵I was an invited speaker at the British Combinatorial Conference in Goldsmiths' College in July 1987; the main talks were published in advance. Carol was the editor of the volume.

⁴⁶No Thameslink in those days.

beside them. Have the snow-clearing services suddenly become so much more effective, or was there enough residual warmth in the bitumen to melt the flakes falling on it?

There were, however, some bad bits, and there was more snow falling at quite a rate, blown on a brisk wind, so that I ran fast but not superfast. I went out through Wytham to Botley Road but, on impulse, decided that I didn't want to tackle Cumnor Hill with the snow and wind in my face, so turned the other way and ran in to the station. To save crossing the road or going under the bridge without a footpath, I went on the towpath around the station and back to Hythe Bridge Street; this also added a little bit of mileage to the run. Then I went home by my usual cycle route. By this time I'd slowed a bit, so that when I made an effort over the bridge, I accelerated quite a bit by comparison. What could I not achieve if I could keep these speeds up?

It was about 54 minutes in total.

If the weather turns cold of there is much more snow, my running will be seriously curtailed.

I'm much stiffer than usual after that run!

Sunday 8/3/87

This week's tour wasn't quite what I expected. The plan was to go round the ring road to Horspath road, then detour through Horspath and Wheatley, taking the Forest Hill to Islip road to the Elsfeld turn, and back on the ring road from Marston, that is, just going the other way round Shotover.

It was a cold day with a lot of snow on the ground. Most of the run I wished I'd worn another jumper; the wind cut through my sweatshirt. The snow generated a kind of haze which transformed the familiar and less-familiar landscapes. Before Wytham, I saw a man and a woman in a car having a cuddle, looking out on a wilderness of snow, without even the engine running for warmth. After Botley, on the only stretch of loose snow I found, there were two sets of footprints; both runners had strides only about two-thirds of mine.

I reached Horspath road in just under an hour, and set out into the unknown, to Horspath, where just after the railway bridge (whose graffiti reads "Silver Jubilee 1977", it's that kind of village) I went wrong. My instincts were to take the Littleworth road, but the other one was signposted to Wheatley and Garsington. The ridge looked spectacular and mysterious in the haze. Running up the dead straight road up the hill, I saw a curious illusion: the trees at the top overhung the

road, continuing its converging lines, so that it appeared as if a chunk of sky was actually ice-covered road. Then a car came over the hill, smashing the illusion.

Thus I came into Wheatley from an unexpected direction and found myself heading up Old Road, instead of across the A40. So I continued on the familiar route over Shotover. The Plain was covered with puddles so huge I was forced into the loose snow. Back on the ring road, a runner who'd chased me since Old Road caught me at Marston, and we came back together, quite fast, though I felt very very relaxed! He still had to go down the river to Sandford.

Monday 9/3/87

Yesterday's run measured 5 miles more than the ring road, that is $20\frac{1}{2}$ miles, if my measurement of the ring road is exact. This makes it about 6.40/mile, including the slow stretch over Shotover. It would have been 101 or 102 minutes for the ring road alone, which is slightly under 6.40/mile, and remarkably good considering the conditions. I seem to have put the mental block about the ring road behind me, and moreover, running twenty miles or so is no longer an ordeal (at the moment) which bodes well for May. If the atmosphere is as good as people say, I should be able to keep the pace up for the last six miles, especially if I'm fitter by then, and get in a few minutes under three hours.

This isn't pie-in-the-sky; the combination of cold and unusual stiffness yesterday must have slowed me, and it is reasonable to expect better conditions in May. I think the stiffness must have been due to running in the snow, making unusual demands on muscles to correct slipping, and so on.

I've been thinking a bit about ending this record. Of course, the eighth of May is in no sense an end. It may be that, for illness or injury or any other reason, I run badly, and it ends on a low note – that wouldn't do, and I might even have to give it up before then. But even if it goes well, all sorts of issues raised in these notebooks won't be resolved, such as: how quickly will I recover after the marathon, and how soon get back to training? Will I run Otmoor, or East London, or both? If it were a novel, one would choose the artistically right moment to bring it to a close, which might well be the race; but that's not its purpose, and life isn't like that anyway. Perhaps the answer is just to fill up the notebook current at race time. But already I'm scraping the barrel for things to write about!

Tuesday 10/3/87

I did my usual Tuesday stint, but it was embedded in a much wider day of strangeness and ill fortune.

It began when I was cycling down the Woodstock Road towards the station. I heard a “click, click, click”, and my front tyre began to go down, and was soon quite flat. Dismounting, I found a large drawing pin embedded in it. What good fortune that it was Tuesday, so that first it wouldn’t really matter if I missed the train, and second, I had the best chance of catching it, since I had my running shoes on and not much in my backpack. So I ran to the station and caught my train. But it was abnormally crowded and I didn’t get a seat, so I had to sit, steaming and sweaty, in the cold guard’s van. I had to do some exercises before we got to Paddington to avoid seizing up altogether. The run went better than expected; despite a cold wind from the south-east, which opposed me more the nearer I got to the end, I was only 15 seconds slower than last week. But the last blow of fate was no hot water in the showers. As a result, I was stiffer than I should have been, though not as bad as Saturday.

I knocked off early because of Dave Cohen’s seminar in Oxford. Having time, and seeing no sign of a Metropolitan line train, I rode the District line to Hammer-smith, crossed the road, and took the route over the rooftops back to Paddington. It took about an hour, not that much longer than any other route to Paddington and the same as running.

After the seminar and a quick pint in the pub, I had to get my crippled bike back home; I ran most of the way doing this. This raised the possibility of training twice a day. Perhaps it’s true that this only works if I’m pretty fit to start with.

Wednesday 11/3/87

Today, because of having to see Tracey⁴⁷ before lunch, I put off running until I got back from the dentist. (The dentist’s hygienist gave me a lesson on using floss, something I should do seriously and regularly.)

I did the Wytham hill, increasing the number of repetitions to seven. I admit to having been lazy on the first two and the sixth; I know because of the contrast, since the others were all at full throttle, including an all-out sprint to the top in the last one, which took my pulse to 144 or slightly higher, momentarily. I finished the session with a bit of extra distance around Wytham village, then pushed it hard

⁴⁷Maund, my last Oxford doctoral student

on the way home. This, I think, is an important part of the exercise, getting used to keeping the pace up when the muscles are beginning to lock with fatigue. (In fact it wasn't like that. After my sprint up the hill, I took the brakes half off and strode down the hill, giving my Windrunner shoes their head; and there was very little tiredness in my legs on the way home.)

One lovely image from the run: the setting sun, dipping below the solid dark foliage of a stand of fir trees, peered out through their trunks as if a grate. Shades of the Ancient Mariner, except that it wasn't blood-red. Frost-haze doesn't redden sunlight the way smoke-haze does. Why? Presumably the different size of the particles comprising the haze.

I still marvel at how well it's all going at the moment. This comment is brought on by an article on "Fatigue" in the current *Running*, which said, "If your daily comments are 'recovered quickly', or 'good and hard', there's no problem. But if they read 'sluggish', 'felt hard', 'struggling for the last five miles', you are getting into the danger zone." Now in the old days, my training diary read like the second sentence; but this year it's been very much the first.

Thursday 12/3/87

On a glorious spring day, cool but sunny, with only the lightest breeze, I was one of many Londoners who went to the park. In Victoria Park there was a large party of schoolchildren, and an old lady who had come by taxi to feed the pigeons (or perhaps she was the taxi-driver's mother).

I ran faster than I'd anticipated to get there. Just after I turned onto the towpath, I was overtaken by two runners going at a fair lick, so I tucked in behind them for the ride, glorying in my own strength and well-being, and taking two relaxed strides to their three intense ones.

I turned into the park and did nine solid repetitions. By the end of the seventh I was starting to feel the effect of fatigue a bit, and I think I made the eighth recovery a bit slower than the others, but I finished them all at a good pace; the ninth was definitely not slower than the eighth.

At the end of the ninth, two blokes in a van across the road told me I'd taken 3.25 for that lap; we chatted a bit, they asked me if I was training for the marathon. I jogged off feeling absurdly happy for my warmdown lap.

Back along the towpath, I pushed the pace along, in accordance with the philosophy stated yesterday. There was a mounted policeman again; this time, he was talking to two people sitting on a seat, not in my way at all.

The water was hot again today, and beautifully relaxing it was.

I had a letter from John Burgass⁴⁸ this morning. He can give me a lift on 12 April. He also says that he is thinking of giving up running marathons. I doubt that he will give up running altogether!

Friday 13/3/87

I celebrated Friday the Thirteenth (the second of three this year) by leaving my keys at home. And I didn't realise until just before I got to work. So my bicycle was locked at the station, and there it is still. It was a departure from routine in another way too – I took a sandwich and some fruit to work, and ate it before my first tutorial. I am definitely hungrier now, and find it harder to skip lunch and resist temptation until I get home, and am even tempted to eat more when I do have lunch (as on Tuesday when, to counteract the chills of the morning, I took a baked potato for my lunch).

On arriving in Oxford, I had intended to take the bus home, but on impulse set off at a jog along the canal towpath. Well, more of a plod actually; I was dressed in ordinary clothes, and had a not-too-light rucksack on my back, with all the books I needed to work over the weekend. And after the gravel stopped, the towpath was disgustingly muddy. So they weren't high-quality miles. But most of this week has been good – indeed it's probably the best week so far – so I don't feel any qualms about counting them in.

We had a "proper supper" tonight, meaning roughly that it wasn't cold chicken and pickle sandwiches, and Sheila and I ate the same thing. We had baked (or rather microwaved, not at all the same thing!) potatoes, with broccoli and sprouts, and chili con carne for sauce. It was very good and satisfying. My diet is pretty poor, and the children's worse; it would be such a worthwhile thing to eat like that more often. I would but for the small matter of time. Though I'm less rushed now, I don't have time hanging on my hands!

Saturday 14/3/87

In town today, we went upstairs in the bookshop in the Clarendon Centre, and I looked at several books, and bought one. The actual one isn't important. (It was by Philippa Pullar, who'd been to India three times and wrote about it, to publishers' deadlines, with honesty, journalistic flair, and above all a clearsighted scepticism even about her own reactions; hardly the book to trigger this reaction.) It made

⁴⁸The librarian at Merton College, with whom I had sometimes run in the past.

me aware that since I've been solidly back into running, I haven't even done any exercises, let alone yoga, and certainly no meditation. It is as if I'm saying, this is what worked for me twenty years ago, and it can work again now. Despite this I know, within me, that what I'm not doing is vitally important. This pushed my thoughts wider. This morning Sheila proposed that at breakfast everyone should make a list of what they wanted to "achieve" this weekend. All the things that crossed my mind – mending the front fence, typing up the proof of my theorem, etc. – filled me with apathy or antagonism. But yoga and meditation instantly seemed the right thing to be on such a list.

I ran the river towpath to Osney to Hinksey to Wytham loop at three o'clock on a cold but bright afternoon. I knew at the start that it felt fast, though I wasn't sure if it was as fast as it felt; I have a bit of a snuffle today. Along the path to Hinksey I was thinking, there is value in this escapade, it teaches my body what disaster strikes if it starts that distance at that speed. Then I reached the roundabout in 32.07, gaining strength, and came back in 16.46, a fast stride, not a sprint. That is $\frac{3}{4}$ minute faster than I did between Witney and Carterton last year, and probably about 6minute/mile pace. A good end to my best week yet.

Sunday 15/3/87

This week's tour was around Otmoor: out along the spongey grass verge bypassing Kidlington, riddled with molehills; across the high fields to Islip, with its narrow hilly back street; Oddington, with its squat church, unified in style though transitional between Norman and Early English; Charlton, its muddy main street full of parked cars giving it the feel of a farming market town; Fencott and Murcott, where I was greeted by a thatcher and (less kindly) a man building a wall respectively; and the incredible ridge where I had to change gear but got to the top with the same rate of effort. So far, it had been an idyllic run; I was floating along at a good pace, conserving energy. Then, at the top of the ridge, I turned into the teeth of a chill north-westerly which was resolutely against me all the way back, through Studley, with its hyper-rich ghetto shrouded by trees; Horton, just down the hill but a much plainer country village; the mad mile and the hill, with warning signs showing deer at the bottom, cows at the top (the wrong way round, surely? the cows should get fit running up the hill); Beckley, with its Roman road and panoramas of Looking Glass Land, and a shrill football match at the very top of the hill; round the road looking down on Noke, the seventh Otmoor town, that I didn't go through on this run; the twisted road past narrow stands of pine into Elsfield and on down the hill to the ring road. Here I hit a wall, not a metabolic

wall but the wind full in my face, through which I struggled home. But though the pace dropped a little, I wasn't tired, and certainly had several more miles of running in me.

The run took 2.36, but the cotton thread method gave the distance as only 22 miles. At that pace, even allowing the hills and wind. it'll be touch and go whether I make 3 hours. A sobering reminder. (But re-measurement added $\frac{3}{4}$ mile.)

Monday 16/3/87

I'm writing this in the morning. Today is a glorious clear sunny morning, though with signs of cloud, and rain and snow promised. I wish I could have run today instead of yesterday.

I'm trying my luck on the bus rather than the train today. Now we have competing services, the City Link is £3.00 and the Oxford Tube 3p cheaper, for a day return; but despite the promised luxury of the latter, people are swarming onto the former. (Though it could be timetables, I suspect it's familiarity.) But I have my doubts about working on this. I don't feel too bright this morning after walking to BK⁴⁹ this morning carrying a big bag of books for Hester and then waiting ages for a bus.

I think that what I was trying to say on Saturday was this. Things are much better now than they were last year; running is the most obvious, but not the only, sign of that. But there are still areas where I'm not in control; and, just when I think I have the strength to grasp them, it slips away from me. But I'm not thinking of using internal discipline in order to gain this strength; rather, I believe that I'd find things falling naturally into place if I did meditate.

Later: I don't think I'll take the bus again; certainly I won't do it regularly. I felt quite unable to work on the way home, and even reading was a terrible effort which I had to abandon from time to time. Even an unheated guard's van is better than this!

But on the other topic, how to make myself meditate? How, even, to carry on the project I started when I began commuting, of remembering and recording my dreams? I'm sure I *could* to all these things, if I were better disciplined. And yet I've just finished saying that meditation doesn't impose discipline but brings its benefits naturally!

⁴⁹Bishop Kirk middle school in Summertown.

Tuesday 17/3/87

St Patrick's Day, the radio tells me.

On Saturday I was filled with well-being; yesterday it had all evaporated and I felt merely a bit sick, but today I'm back on top of the world. Yet I've had a touch of a cold, which may have been slightly worse yesterday than before or after, yet hasn't really changed very much over the three days.

I ran from Paddington again. Because of Sheila and Hester being ill, I was late leaving home, and so had abandoned all hope of catching the 9.03. I cycled gently to the station, intending to work in the buffet until the 9.40 came. But when I got there, at 9.01, the ticket queues had evaporated, and I caught it anyway. Of course there were no seats, so I put my back against the back wall of the train, and read Philippa Pullar's book all the way down, arising at West Ealing to stretch my legs while meditating on the rails sliding away seen through the rear window.

While running, a burst of strength came to me at St Pancras. Thinking of the theory advanced in the book that, if you write the biography of someone who died in unusual circumstances and you find your way mysteriously and coincidentally facilitated, it is the dead person trying to regain life through you, my thoughts turned to the more mundane idea of getting people out of my way by the power of thought. It worked mostly; I had an easy time of it through Islington Market, and when I had to dodge, was able to do it without losing rhythm. I ran the last stretch quite hard, finishing two minutes faster than the last couple of times. There was one new stretch of towpath open, just after the Maida Hill tunnel; this actually slowed me a little, first since it meant steep steps rather than a ramp, and second because a big dog went for me under the bridge, actually making contact, but cringing away when I shouted at him.

Wednesday 18/3/87

I feel like something of a slacker today. The intermittent upset tummy came back with a vengeance; but it wasn't a case of being unable to run, rather "awarded myself the luxury of a holiday".

There were distractions – I was down town with Sheila and went vegetable shopping in the Wednesday market, then had coffee; then went to the Institute and worked in the library for a while, chasing references and reading about well-quasi-orderings, a hot topic now (and, by one of those remarkable coincidences, relevant both to Hrushovski's paper that I've promised to discuss in the Wednesday meetings and to Peter Neumann's paper that Jacinta and I are talking about;

and I picked a book from the shelf because it looked as if it might be interesting, and found a beautifully clear introduction by Eric Milner.

What else? I got home at 5 and had to take the boys to choir at 6.45. I could have fitted in a run then; it was at this point that the laziness really operated. Things are still holding up remarkably well (touch wood, the snuffle and the tummy will pass!), and there is still plenty of time to get stale, which risk is undoubtedly reduced by taking things a little bit easy.

The only worrying thing is that inroads into my time, or laziness, mid-week, eat into speed-work at a time when it should be coming more to the fore. I may have to think about converting the Saturday session from “whatever takes my fancy” into, perhaps, fartlek, or maybe more repetitions. Let’s see what I fancy this week!

Thursday 19/3/87

An odd day, and an odd session.

I worked at home today. It was an amazing work-day; ideas poured out, everything went beautifully, so that I can now say (for example) that I understand what’s going on in the matrix problem that Dan Hughes posed on Monday. I can show finiteness of the number of indecomposables for given n (modulo an “obvious” result on real linear algebra which is probably well known in linear programming), and find them all for $n \leq 3$, as well as 4×8 s. In the other direction, I have a trivial construction for $n \times n^2$ for any n , and a very general construction from designs with $k \mid v$ which gives, in particular, an $n \times 2n$ whenever a Hadamard matrix of order $2n$ exists (i.e., probably for all even n).⁵⁰ In addition, I proved a guess I made to Jacinta yesterday, and saw why some form of the hypothesis I assumed is needed.

A good part of this was done while I was running. I did Wytham hill 8 times, and so engrossed was I in mathematics that I’d half-finished before I noticed (and even under-counted). To start, I thought I felt sluggish, but it wasn’t that; though the efforts were not very hard, the overall times were slightly quicker than usual, and the running felt easy and joyful. The impression was, “Why strain? This is the pace at which it feels best!”

Towards the end, I saw a violent blue storm over the hill behind Cassington. It crept up unawares, so that at the top of my last repetition, gentle blossom-like flakes drifted down, turning into a blizzard with wind and low visibility fifty yards

⁵⁰This work was published in *Linear Algebra and Applications* in 1989.

down the hill. It buffeted me all the way home, but stopped and cleared in time for Sheila to run by 6pm.

Friday 20/3/87

The entry form for Sheila in the Kidlington 10km came this morning, with some race details. They are also having runs for the under 12s, under 10s, and under 7s. I hope we can persuade at least some of the children to enter. I sent off Sheila's form straight away. Don't let her have second thoughts!

They also enclosed an application form to join the Kidlington Running Club. This is in some ways an attractive idea. Whatever the membership costs, I would go some way towards recouping it in saving the 50p AAA levy when I enter races; and, if we took family membership, we'd save Sheila's 50p as well. This sounds a poor reason for joining, but there are others – I'd be better able to find transport on occasions like this April 12th when the Abingdon half-marathon coincides with a work-day for Sheila. Unfortunately, I don't relish the thought of going often to Kidlington – there and back is already a fair run, and not an attractive one (unless I go along the canal towpath).⁵¹

I had intended to do a few miles on getting home, more for the sake of mileage than anything else. But after working through lunch (belatedly setting exam papers), then getting home only an hour before we had to leave for the B.K.⁵² barn dance, there was just no conceivable time for running; I skipped it without guilt. At the barn dance, I was enthusing to the Fishers⁵³ about how well it was going, and how well I feel on it. And that is undeniably true. Though, as I said, everything else has gone by the board (exercises, etc.), yet things are so good that I don't really want to change. It is a bit like an addiction; but that makes it so much easier to keep it up. I don't remember it ever being this easy before.

Saturday 21/3/87

In the best tradition of March weather, there was war in heaven this afternoon while I ran the Bladon circuit. As I stepped out of the door, hard lumps of snow, almost hail, were tipping down; they stopped quite soon, and we had sun, craggy clouds, and mild air. Then a brisk northerly wind sprang up and blew in my face

⁵¹In the event, I joined Oxford City Athletic Club later in the year.

⁵²Bishop Kirk school.

⁵³Parents of Neill's friend Robbie.

for a few minutes until I turned into Bladon. As I ran the dream stretch, the ragged treeline of Wytham was reflected, enlarged, distorted and inverted in a big angry cloud which came and started sleeting on me, fortunately only after I'd had a good stretch with the wind behind me. In the last few minutes I got thoroughly soaked.

In the circumstances, it wasn't surprising that I went quite fast. I amazed myself by the speed at which I took off. I kept up a good pace along the A34, until that wind hit me just before the roundabout. It knocked me back so much that I thought I was finished. But relief came when I turned out of the wind. I coasted down through Bladon and then started turning on the effort. I powered up the hill and then strode beautifully along the dream stretch. And, unbelievably, I felt I was loafing; I'm sure I could have run much harder if I had tried. On the A40, thank the Lord, the wind, and the sleety cold rain when it started, were behind me, and I was able to keep the pace up. I only got appreciably tired at the roundabout, but even then the pace was quite reasonable.

And the time? 71.12! Three minutes better than my best ever, on a course I've run many times, and four better than my best this season. Compared to a month ago, I'm uniformly faster on all stretches.

At this sort of pace, I should be aiming for 1.15 at Abingdon. My half-marathon times have been about $5\frac{1}{2}$ minutes slower than my time for this circuit, and Abingdon should be a faster course than Witney. But after my only (disastrous) run on that course, I dare not hope for too much.⁵⁴

Sunday 22/3/87

Today I paid the price for yesterday.

It was a gloriously clear morning, with small clouds casting shadows on sparkling hills. We went out to the motel for breakfast. (I was the only one to have an "official" breakfast, but of course it doesn't matter.) Then the boys walked back with me while Sheila and Hester went out to Woodstock to walk. At 10 I went out running, inevitably back towards Woodstock. I reached the roundabout in 33 minutes, which isn't too slow! But, for a change, I carried on through Woodstock.

The day was clouding over, but without entirely losing its unearthly clarity. Perhaps because of this, I noticed some things I hadn't given attention to before – the stone house of Stonehouse Farm, the almshouses at Woodstock. As I passed through the lowest part of Woodstock, crossing the Glyme, I saw a runner in a

⁵⁴I had been coming down with 'flu on the day of the race, and ended up having to have quite a long lay-off.

green tracksuit top inside the park. I had given myself the option of cutting the run short by going through the park at the next entrance, but didn't feel the need to take it. Up on the high rolling ground, one was quite unaware of Wootton, invisible in its steep valley just a mile or so away. Turning onto the Charlbury road, I saw the green runner turning out of the Ditchley gate ahead of me. He was going at a fair pace, but I caught him, and we ran together to Combe, slightly slower than the pace I'd been doing. Lovely road up to Combe through the trees, with a row of chimneys rising over the hilltop, looking at first like fenceposts. There were a couple of hundred people in the lower park, and I put on a bit of speed here. But I really tired by the time I reached Bladon, and I struggled home in a very laborious way, though still at a fair pace, substituting the canal for the last bit of road. Very tired afterwards. But a nice run.

Monday 23/3/87

I meant to add to Saturday's account that there must have been some stimulant in the atmosphere. After I'd run that beautiful run on the Bladon loop, Sheila went out and ran what is for her an even better run: down Woodstock Road to Broad Street, Parks Road, and Banbury Road, and back that way. I'd estimate it at $6\frac{3}{4}$ miles, and she ran it in 55 minutes – a little over 8 minute mile pace. At that rate she should break 50 at Kidlington on Saturday.

Anyway, I was very tired after yesterday, and today will certainly not help. We had Jacinta, Tracey, Dave and Geoff to dinner; all except Geoff cooked. It was not the usual scrum, just the six of us after the kids went to bed. I started the meal off with Korean "nine varieties" (except that there were only eight since I couldn't find spring onions); then we had Jacinta's dry beef and coconut (clouds of smoke in the kitchen as she burnt it in the wok) and Tracey's sweet and sour onions, then Dave's pork vindaloo with vegetables, then Jacinta's chocolate mousse (from the NSW Dairy Association cookbook). Then, after coffee, we sang until the small hours (or not so small – it was 2.30 when they left). I went to bed, but had drunk too much coffee to sleep well. James came in just after six, then at seven I admitted defeat and washed dishes until 8.30 when it was time to go to London. (Needless to say, this account has slipped into Tuesday and is being written then.)

But I have quite a sleep deficit to make up now. But what a pleasant evening. I like singing almost as much as running, running almost as much as mathematics.

Tuesday 24/3/87

It was a better day than I'd feared.

I didn't say yesterday that my bike has a flat tyre again; I didn't discover it until I'd dropped James off at school, and so then I pushed it home and caught the bus and the 9.40 train, observing that according to the timetable the 9.43 gets to Reading earlier! In fact it usually does, but it didn't yesterday or today because they put the 9.40 on the fast line from Didcot. On Monday, after 3 Metropolitan line trains in a row had arrived at Whitechapel, I decided to walk; but today there was no problem.

Anyway, it was a good day – things fitted together. I wrote a 100-line Pascal program, from scratch, on the train; at work I typed it in, and it had only one bug (which, however, needed some spotting – it was the “if ... then if ... then ... else ...” problem. It was to find the ultimate period of a sum-free set generated by a periodic input. Then, after lunch, I got a phone call from one of the other two people in the world interested in that problem, Neil Calkin at Waterloo. He's coming to see me on Friday.

It was on the train on the way home that I started to get tired. I was going to work on the train, but instead I put my head against the window and dozed. I didn't exactly sleep; the sound of two women in the compartment talking remained audible but quite unintelligible, a kind of meaningless babble. I drifted back to consciousness after Didcot, and their talk became clothed in sense once again.

I had vaguely thought of a little run, and I could have done it, but a combination of tiredness and rain led me into temptation. James had invited Matthew Gillett to play, and I couldn't go to bed until he'd been collected, which didn't happen until after 8! Then Hester and Neill insisted on watching telly until 8.30, so I left them to it.

Wednesday 25/3/87

Back on the road today, for a good session on Wytham hill. It was raining at breakfast time, but the rain eased off, and when I went out at 11.00 it was just lowering clouds, but surprisingly clear for all that, with a rich deep blue horizon line. There was a surprising amount of traffic, foot, bicycle and truck, on the road, but fortunately it managed to come mostly while I was coming down. I ran the hill eight times. Again, thinking about mathematics made the session pass very quickly. I set myself the exercise of deciding when the root system A_n is maximal

in \mathbb{R}^n , and found a neat argument that this holds if and only if $n \neq 7, 8$.

I think the session was neither too fast nor too slow. I pushed hard in the last repetition, with good effect. Then I put in a bit of extra distance at the bottom, around Wytham village, and when I turned for home I didn't need to work hard: I floated along, well clear of the tarmac, at a fast pace and with minimal effort.

Then, after showering and going down town, I was in celebratory mood, and drank three pints of beer at lunchtime, and ate fresh bread at teatime.

The other thing I forgot to mention yesterday was the arrival of fresh blurb from the London Marathon, including the apparently all-important registration card. My number is 255T, but there is no point remembering that, because they claim that they won't let you in without it. It is the most amazing multi-stage process. First, the form from the Nationwide (pay £1 for that, send it off, but it's only an application for an application). Then the real form, pay £8, and send it off. Then another form, just conveying the news whether you're in or out. Then the registration card, but it isn't that, because you have to take it to a registration centre to register. This gives you a number and a bar-code (the 4th "personal identification" after HP45, 14366, and 255T). What then?

Thursdday 26/3/87

Two aspects of measuring distances.

Sheila's number, that she won't be using, for Abingdon came today. (No sign of mine yet, but no panic just yet.) I used the cotton and thread method to measure the course (to calibrate the method), and came up with 21km or just a shade under, which is certainly near enough!

Then, on my run to Cumnor Hill, I found that numbers had been painted on the road from the Wytham turn to the lodge at the foot of the roundabout hill, at odd multiples of 10, starting at 450 for some reason! I ran 1000 units of distance in 3.34 on the way back. Also on the way back, I got from the roundabout to home in 16.18. If you assume that I ran the entire distance at even pace, and also that the units are metres, you find the distance to the roundabout and back to be between 9.1 and 9.2km, or about $5\frac{3}{4}$ miles, which is very slightly over my old estimates. In fact, it may be slightly more, since the measured stretch was uphill and I probably finished faster.

But note the fast finish there. It was a very lop-sided run. There was a strong wind blowing, against me most of the way out and with me most of the way back. It slowed me to 18.30 to the roundabout and brought me virtually to a standstill at the top of the hill. I had in mind 30.50 for the halfway split, but I'm sure that's

wrong; 31.50 would be much more plausible. Then, once I turned, I flew along, getting to the roundabout in 43.06 and home in 59.24. Easily my best for this course, but think what it might have been but for the wind. (And, conversely, think how disastrous a race would be if it is as windy as that.)

The extra mile today is from running up to school and back this morning with Sheila.

Friday 27/3/87

If the wind yesterday was strong, today it was gale-force, and brought me to a standstill on my way to the station.

I went out running, intending, by force of habit, to do repetitions in Victoria Park. After the first one, I felt the need of liberation, and decided to combine fartlek and exploration instead; so I set out to look at the rest of the park.

It really is a park with everything. I knew about the duck lake, the kiosk, and a small menagerie; but subsequently I found a running track, football fields, a memorial, a second lake, a second collection of animals, a vast bandstand, what appeared at first to be a maximum-security prison for dwarfs (except that the barbed wire was arranged to prevent entry rather than egress), and a marvellous children's play area with sandpit, hippopotamuses, rockpile, and a real (though small and artificial) hill, up which I ran 20 times. I also did some circuits over tussocks, sprints into and with the wind, and longer efforts. The term "windsprints" gained a whole new meaning; I really moved fast and far with the wind at my back. I ran for 52 minutes all told.

The unfortunate thing was that I'd put some money in the pocket Sheila made in my track suit top, but somewhere along the way, a one pound coin had fallen out. So I didn't get any lunch. Then, after spending a productive afternoon with Neil Calkin talking about sum-free sets, I was so hungry that I weakened and ate a sandwich on the train.

My number for Abingdon came this morning. A casual glance suggested that the rest of the bump was the same as Sheilas's, but I didn't have time to check before work. Just over two weeks to go now.

Saturday 28/3/87

This diary is far more boring than I expected.

After December, I had expected it would recount a succession of injuries, struggles against pain, heroic attempts to run races while only half fit, etc. Instead,

since the New Year, I've had a week off for weather and a week off for 'flu, and even counting those in, I've averaged over forty miles a week; and for the last six weeks, I've been running between fifty and sixty a week, and times for all my training courses have been tumbling, right on cue. In the shower tonight I was fantasising about writing to *TR* after the London saying how wise they were not to tell my story, since it would have been totally without interest and drama.

Of course, six weeks is still lots of time for things to go wrong. If I were superstitious, I would never have written the first line on this page, still less put that fantasy on paper.

Today the wind was very much reduced. (Last night it took Sheila $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours to get from the station to the top of the Woodstock Road by car, just because of the disruption caused by the wind.) I ran the Cassington–Yarnton loop, and very nearly beat that mythical 46mins recorded in my training book for 28/12/84. (I'm sure it's wildly out.) What wind there was, was against me on the way out, and behind me coming back, there was a gentle shower, through which the sun broke. I changed gear at the top of the ridge and, reaching Cassington bridge in 29.44, sprinted the A40 to get back in 46.22.

It's a course I've seldom run. Maybe that mythical 46 was a deterrent; more likely it's that most of it is beside busy roads, and even the Yarnton to Cassington stretch is busier for its width than I like. But the view over Shotover was gloriously clear. In this odd weather recently, we've had really striking atmospheric conditions.

Sunday 29/3/87

I thought this Sunday run would turn out disastrous; but in fact, it ended up a good, tough outing.

We went out to dinner with Traude and Pat. Between six of us, we put away four bottles of wine and a quantity of punch, and we didn't get home until 1.30 in the morning. Then the clocks went forward an hour, cutting into my already depleted sleep time; and it wasn't very good sleep, because of the strong coffee. Then the wind had got up again, and I started out into its teeth. By Cassington I had definitely decided to cut it short and come back on the Wynsham–Hinksey road.

But with the wind behind me and the full sun in my face, I began to revive. I had no hesitation, at the first decision point, in taking the Cumnor road; and I sailed up the hill so easily that I carried on to Wootton, giving myself an extra two miles into the wind on the way back. Foolhardy and reckless. The first hint of

what was in store came when thirteen runners, obviously a Sunday morning club run, came struggling along the other way. They all greeted me, but one said only the word “Windy!”

I took the little road to Old Boar’s Hill. The views were wonderful, clear hills, cloud shadows over Oxford spires, rolling green slopes. Many trees were down in the Open University car park, and the road was closed, though there was no obstruction.

I decided to come back along the river rather than Wytham, to try to minimise the wind strength. The floods were spectacular. At the bottom of Port Meadow, the water stretched uninterrupted from the west back to the rubbish tip, and the boats at Medley were isolated in the middle of a wide torrent. The water was over the path at one point, and I had to wade, getting two shoes full of water. The wind made it a real struggle, but my tail was up and I accepted the challenge. A $2\frac{1}{4}$ hour run.

Monday 30/3/87

I asked earlier what would be the natural finishing point for this diary, given that reality has no finishing point. I’m beginning to think now that the answer is “As soon as I possibly can”. I’m bored with trying to think up something new to write every day, especially since my training is so uneventful at the moment. No possibility of filling these pages with mock heroics (not that I’d really want to anyway).

The heretical thought even crossed my mind that perhaps I’m really training for Abingdon, and all the ballyhoo about London is just to keep me at it until 12 April.

In any case, my imagined scenario for London is that, in the crush of 28000 runners, it’ll take me a quarter of an hour to pass the starting post, and any idea of evaluating myself on the basis of official time will be quite meaningless. The speed I’m aiming to run includes allowance for slowing in the last few miles and still getting under 3 hours, but I can’t afford to carry a long delay at the start. Anyway, where is the sense in a time so removed from reality?

Abingdon, on the other hand, should be a moderate field, and I don’t expect to be held up for more than a minute at the start; and the course looks beautifully flat. I have also fantasised putting on speed in the second lap after plodding round the first at six-minute mile pace.

The point really is that it would be much more sensible to direct my main effort at Abingdon. This may happen anyway; I’m very fit now but five and a

half weeks (nearly six) is plenty long enough to get stale. Also, I am untried over marathon distance but comfortably used to half-marathon; and though I hope I've trained sensibly, there is no substitute for race practice.

Tuesday 31/3/87

Sheila's birthday.

I accompanied Hester's year to the Cotswold Wildlife Park. I don't know whether it was that the walking and standing round got to my legs. But when I got home, changed, and set off on the road, I felt I was moving very slowly, although I got to Wytham in just over $8\frac{1}{2}$ minutes, which is acceptable warmup pace.

Indeed, the whole session felt slow, although it didn't take appreciably longer than usual. I did eight times up Wytham hill again. I had to wait a bit to start the second one, while an animal transporter and a car passed on the road just above me and indulged in a long conversation. Perhaps, as a result, I started too fast – but it was agonisingly hard work from about halfway. For the third, I didn't try to start slower, but I did push my stride out a bit, so as to get that feeling of greater efficiency. Anyway, it, and the remainder of the session, went much more smoothly. I didn't lose count until the end, when I succeeded in seeing how (I think) my lower bound for the probability of getting only numbers congruent to 2 or 3 mod 5 in a random sum-free set can be improved by a factor of 121/64 just as I reached the top, thinking I'd done seven, though the evidence of my watch showed that it was eight. I ran my usual little extra on the way home.

I did indulge myself to the extent of not pushing it hard on the way home, just striding reasonably briskly.

Later we went out to dinner in College. It was a guest night, and the place was full of old friends, many of them runners. A very enjoyable evening. An innovation at Merton was serving Perrier along with the wine, which apart from filling a need, meant that one tends to drink less wine. Home by 11, feeling fine.

Wednesday 1/4/87

I have been very lucky with the weather. There has only been one week (less than a week, really) in which the snow made running too dangerous. The only very windy day we had, I managed to turn my training into fun. And there has been very little rain.

Today, then, the conditions were probably the worst I've been out in this year. It was a very wet day: great heavy clouds bowling along the sky with a hard

wind driving them, heavy rain slanting down, splashy puddles underfoot, clouds of vapour billowing under the trees.

I ran out to Wytham, a little faster than yesterday, to do repetitions on the level, instead of up the hill. I ran six times the stretch from the T-junction to the farm, with a short jogged recovery between. The road was so wet that a good part of my energy went into puddle-jumping or swerving around the larger pools. There was a very great difference between there and back, due to the wind; going down was real running, coming back a battle. And I got wetter and wetter until I was absolutely soaked and very cold at the end. I didn't feel like pushing it on the way home, not even for the sake of getting out of the rain quicker. I just jogged back.

Not a very good run. Even discounting the weather, I think it still wasn't terribly good. Does one further discount a night out and say it was OK? Or is it staleness? And will the staleness be cured by a rest before the race, or have I gone over the top and am heading downhill?

Last season I was within 10% of my best ever. I really wanted to better that. I'm sure I'll never again set a really honest personal best, but my more limited goals should be possible. But have I blown it this year?

Thursday 2/4/87

I got back home in good time today after going to London. On the Woodstock Road, my bike seemed to have developed a new gear, or overdrive; I flew along, pedalling as fast as my feet would go, in top gear.

It was a sunny, reasonably warm day, with little wind, and it grieved me to waste it after yesterday's ordeal; but my knees were niggling a little bit and feeling as if a day's rest would be of benefit. And I'm trying to guard against miles for their own sake now; I'm quite fit, and am likely to improve my race performance more by keeping injury-free than by piling on distance when I'm a bit stale. So, instead of changing and going out at 4.30, I sat down and worked for a while, and then had my supper.

Just as I was finishing, Sheila was setting out for her run, and persuaded Hester to go out with her. Then Neill wanted to come too, and James, rather than be left alone decided that he'd join in as well. So we all set out along Godstow Road.

We hadn't gone far before Hester, almost in tears, refused to run with James, then said she'd hurt her ankle. Once she persuaded me to come with her in the other direction, her ankle mysteriously stopped troubling her; and, though she got tearful when I criticised her. and complained of a terrible pain which she wouldn't believe was a stitch, she kept going reasonably well. We got back to the house at

the same time as the others. James had got a pain and stopped, but Neill, slightly pink in the face but very stylish, had charged on ahead. James went into the house, but the rest of us went for a little gallop on the meadow, which all enjoyed.

Hester is now cutting running shoes out of magazines for her project on feet, while I write things about her she'd probably rather not read.

Friday 3/4/87

I was just about to set out for the dentist this morning when Ann Cook⁵⁵ phoned to say, the real analysis paper had come back from the external examiner, could I come and deal with it? Then when I got to the dentist, I was greeted with bewilderment, they thought I shouldn't be there at all, but the dentist looked at my teeth just so the trip wouldn't be wasted. Then I cycled to the station, but realised, when I got there, that I hadn't delivered Sheila's letter to the bank; but thanks to having fifteen minutes to spare, and the open station system, I had time to go and deliver it and still be back in time to eat my sandwiches and catch the train.

It was one of my quickest trips ever. The computer hadn't finished looking for the period of a sumfree set, so I couldn't give it another job to do; and there was no pressing mail, so I turned around and came home.

I'd wondered about Wytham hill or Cumnor hill, but settled eventually on the towpath. It was fairly greasy after Wednesday's rain, but not too disastrously bad. The wind was easterly, a cross-wind, but slightly more against me going out than coming back. This was my first time on the canal towpath this year, apart from half-hearted endings to long runs a few times. I aimed for Thrupp, but went on to Shitpon-on-Cherwell (just to the first bridge), getting there in 32.36. I put in a very strong spell of running after turning for home, but I began to tire in the fluctuating wind and increasing muddiness, staggering home in 63.53. It was a good, solid run, a different kind of exercise from what I've been used to this year, and softer on the knees than the roads.

Neill was keen to run again today, but there wasn't time before he had to go to choir.

⁵⁵A secretary at QMC, fondly remembered by all who were there over the long period she reigned in the general office.

Saturday 4/4/87

It rained quite hard all day today. I felt a little bit stiff, in the region of my Achilles tendons and the insides of my thighs. A message in a bottle?

After being in town all day – taking the boys to toyshops, meeting Sheila, having lunch at the Mitre, going to watch her play real tennis with Tom Braun⁵⁶, going to his house for tea afterwards, then to Sainsbury's on the ring road for the week's shopping – we got home at about 4.45. The kids were keen to run again, after Thursday, but Hester made a fuss and wouldn't come straight away. So I ended up doing two shifts to Wytham, first with Neill and then with Hester, with a short gap between. The running was of course (for me) very slow, but each time I did a fast lap of the cricket field while the child rested, so not all of today's miles have been jogging.

It was a good chance to compare their styles. Neill started at a steady pace; he had to stop a few times with a stitch, but then started up again at the same pace, and only at the end did he start to tire and slow down. Hester, on the other hand, bounded off at a pace she couldn't possibly sustain, and was soon puffing and panting, though she doggedly kept going (at a slower pace). Inwardly the difference was that Neill set out at his pace and kept to it, whereas Hester kept being distracted by the competitive urge; every time I passed her to run single file because of an approaching car, she speeded up. But each of them ran with a beautiful relaxed style, remarkable in ones so young and with so little experience of running. They held their style until they really started to tire near the end, when each began to flail around a bit. And, for them, it was a good pace that we set, too.

Sunday 5/4/87

It was necessary to curtail my Sunday run today, because Hester had a rehearsal in the morning and was singing in Christ Church in the afternoon (at Oxford's first ever ordination of women as deacons). So I ran the ring road. This suits my purposes too, winding down before next week and getting race practice. In the event, it was better practice than I had expected; I started too fast (17.42 at Cumnor roundabout, 53.06 at the BL clock), and had to struggle against growing fatigue on the way home. In an uneventful run, I kept up the workrate, and finished in 96.14, two minutes faster than my previous best, though perhaps not as fast as I might have wished. This is somewhere between 6.10 and 6.15 per mile. Presumably,

⁵⁶The Classics fellow at Merton.

running a shorter distance under race conditions, I will go faster; but, thinking about the longer distance, this seems hopeful. If I could keep up 6.30 a mile for over 20 miles, I could afford to slow down quite a bit and still get under three hours. This is probably the right course of action now.

After lunch we collected Hester and took her to Christ Church. Naively I'd hoped we could go to the service, but it was tickets only; we had a job persuading them to let us take Hester in. But instead we found a marvellous exhibition of Rabindranath Tagore at the Museum of Modern Art; they were showing a video of his life, which even managed to keep James quiet for a while, though walking round the galleries was hard on my legs! Neill loved it.

Monday 6/4/87

Last night I was afflicted with tingling feet when I went to bed. Sheila went to sleep with the radio on, but it kept jerking me back to wakefulness as I was dropping off, so I reached up and turned it off, which thoroughly woke me; and then the tingling started, and I couldn't get to sleep by overriding it. Fortunately the cure is very simple: I got up and splashed cold water on my feet, and I was fine. I don't remember how I discovered that trick; it just seemed obvious. Also, I don't know the cause. I did read once that it was a symptom of thyroid malfunction, and took it as evidence that my cyst really was interfering with my thyroid; but the doctors thought that all was well after the operation, so presumably it's not that.⁵⁷

Also, I've recently had a mild recurrence of the disorientation that I noticed last summer, but much less serious or frequent than it was then.

Today was a mixture of warm sunshine and cold rain. I went out in a spell of sunshine, and though it clouded over and cooled down, it didn't actually start raining while I was out. I ran Wytham hill eight times. Again, as on the last couple of sessions there, it felt as if I wasn't working at full pace, and yet the session wasn't any slower. But towards the end of the last repetition, I remembered where I was, and made a dash for the line, lifting the pace quite noticeably. I took it easy on the way home, though, and even skipped the customary loop around the church and abbey before leaving Wytham village. It was, after all, a customary rest day. (I'm trying to squeeze my miles in early in the week so I can rest towards the end.)

I certainly wasn't too knocked about by yesterday's run, suggesting that I could have worked much harder. No doubt the race next Sunday will give me the opportunity to do just that, and (if I really try) to knock myself about so that

⁵⁷I had an operation to remove a benign thyroid cyst in early 1985.

I'm in no fit state to run the London.

Tuesday 7/4/87

I didn't intend to have a rest day today. I meant to get home from work early enough to run, but things conspired against me. I spent longer at work than I had intended, and caught the 4.20 train, getting home at about 5.45. Then we had to go down to watch Hester in a procession arranged by the dance residency. But we couldn't go till Sheila got home at 6.00 and James at 6.15. We did well to arrive at 6.30. But then we chased the procession, supposed (according to the information we'd received) to go from 6.00 to 7.30, and discovered that it was just grinding to a halt at the Town Hall. So, of course, when we picked Hester up, she was in a furious temper that we'd missed her Sun Dance, made even worse because we wouldn't go to the fish and chip shop to get her some supper. It was, altogether, a difficult evening.

But perhaps it was as well. I'd had a couple of twinges in knees and shins during the day. I don't want anything to go wrong now, in what is really the critical period for Abingdon, at least.

I tingled in the feet again last night, but again the water treatment gave instant relief.

Back at the beginning, I thought that 600 miles before the London would be a reasonable target. Now it looks as if it will be much closer to 800. What does this mean? The thing that has made the main difference to mileage has been the long Sunday runs I've been indulging in; without them, the 50-mile weeks would have been 40-mile weeks. But in fact these runs are probably the most helpful part of training for London, both in getting me accustomed to being on my feet for that length of time, and in giving me confidence that I can stay the distance, without which fitness for running it at a reasonable pace would be wasted because I wouldn't have the nerve to call it into play.

Wednesday 8/4/87

My last hard day prior to a rest spell before Abingdon, And I didn't feel at all like going out. It was with great reluctance that I put on my running gear and set out. I ran up to the roundabout, and found it so jammed with lorries that by the time I'd crossed the A40 I'd gone some distance west, so I decided to go that way. I was aiming for Bladon in 73 minutes, and had also thought that I might get an easier deal from the wind by running clockwise. (I don't think I did, in the end.)

The wind was quite noticeable on the A40, buffeting me about each time a big lorry thundered past (which seemed to happen very frequently) – the perils of running facing the traffic – but I was making a good pace. (I had also decided not to look at my watch.) Then it started to rain, but fortunately a friendly rain, not the kind with hard-hitting icy drops which is so painful. I really enjoyed myself up the dream stretch, and kept the pace up. I was very aware of the geography of the land, the classic pass with its two hills and two valleys, and the fact that each valley had a stream running from the pass with surprisingly much water close to its source.

I slowed a bit coming into Bladon, as the rain eased. This way, much more of the journey is spent running uphill. On the last section, the wind strengthened and blew right in my face, so that the five hills at the end were like running repetitions after a long hard warmup; at Wolvercote roundabout, the wind brought me virtually to a standstill.

I finished in 73.05 which, though my second fastest ever, still struck as a disappointment. On the basis of that, I wouldn't expect to get under 78 minutes on Sunday.

But I recovered very quickly, and drank lots of beer with Jacinta, Dave, Tracey and Annabel at lunchtime.

Thursday 9/4/87

I was tempted out by a spell of glorious sunshine, and decided to go for a nice easy run through Wytham Woods.

I felt very sluggish at first, the wind in my face not helping, but at a nice easy pace the run didn't feel uncomfortable. The woods were greening up at ground level, though the trees are still quite bare. I was surprised to see huge numbers of daffodils by the path; nothing else was in flower except for a few primroses in the lower woods later.

But fairly soon after I set off, a huge grey cloud swallowed the sun, the temperature dropped, and the rain began to spit. Near the bottom of the hill, there was a roaring sound, and down came the hail. It pelted for a while, then changed into rain, which soaked and chilled me; but just as I came out of the woods, the sun came out again, and I had a lovely run in the warm sunshine past the old stone of Wytham and Godstow and back home.

The most spectacular sight of all was the view from the southern end of the hill. First Oxford city in a patch of sunshine, its spires lit up in contrast to the

surrounding gloom; and then the inland sea of Port Meadow, an entire visual field full of water, seemingly even more water than last Sunday week.

When I came home (in a few minutes under an hour), I treated myself to a hot bath, then lay down for a while, and felt very relaxed and comfortable afterwards, I can pamper myself in the time left before Sunday; I've even covered more miles this week than I expected.

I didn't say yesterday that I had an accident when I jumped on my bike to go down town, ending in the gutter with torn trousers and scratched calf; but it doesn't seem serious.

Friday 10/4/87

The extra couple of miles yesterday resulted from taking Neill out to Wytham after supper. He ran better than last time, and didn't get tired until almost home. He does very well for his age and size!

Today, I relaxed, as best I could, instead of running. The morning dawned beautifully clear and sunny; the flood pools on the meadow were blue and sparkled in the light, and the grass was bright green. Sheila left for her three days in London; I went down town with her and, after shopping at Sainsbury's, walked out to the Buddha's Delight (new vegetarian and fish restaurant in Walton Street) where I was the only customer for lunch. It was quite good, though not in the class of the establishment where I ate in Vancouver. There, I had the four priceless jewels; here it was eight treasures (which were two species of mushroom, baby corn, peas, carrots, onions, red and green peppers, cucumber and peanuts – I don't know which ones aren't treasures, or which pairs don't count twice!) Not cheap, though!

Went home, went up to school for James (in case Ruth had forgotten it was the last day of term – she hadn't), then home where I worked, instead of running, for the rest of the afternoon.

This weekend may be a trial, and may stretch my nerves to a point where I can't run well. The signs already point that way, with all three children involved in aggro. I've unashamedly bribed them not to fight. They could, if they chose, do me more damage even than the weather. (The forecast suggests we may be lucky enough to have it fine, but it will be windy!)

Saturday 11/4/87

Today, at least in the morning, it continued to be spring; so much so, that I felt able to put the washing out on the line. But it was exactly as I forecast yesterday; along with the sunshine, a very strong breeze was blowing, bringing in a skyful of cumulus clouds by lunchtime. I went out for what was intended to be an easy stride just before lunch – slow action but pushing legs out – but had to fight the wind most of the way, so it was more of a battle than I'd expected.

I ran to King's Lock, and a little beyond. It was utterly glorious – sunshine on wind-ruffled water, skylarks singing, Wytham's dark roofs behind roofs, set off by the very green grass behind it shining, ringed round with dark trees. There was even the adventure of water over the road. just two strides in the water each way.

In the shower I was filled with well-being, the sort of elation that has been missing for a couple of weeks. But afterwards, there were a few twinges. These were on the insides of my thighs, in my knees, and most significantly, above my heels. The last of these is brought on, above all, by the otherwise excellent back chair. When I get up from it, I can hardly walk for a few minutes!

The children are raising the tension level by their inability to get along. And this is only the first day of the school holidays; whatever will it be like in a fortnight's time? Currently, it's because I offered them fish and chips from the fish and chip shop; nobody was prepared to go and get it, and Hester refuses to eat rather than have oven-baked fish and chips. The monsters! Why, why, why do they have to be like that, just when I don't need it?

Sunday 12/4/87

After continuing clashes of will with Hester, and failure to mend my bike tyre after two attempts, I went to bed tense and depressed at about 10pm. I had no inkling of what was in store. At 11.30, I was woken by loud music from next door; but it didn't last long, and I got back to sleep almost immediately. At 12.30am, James came in and announced that he'd been sick on the bathroom floor. I found him a tub, cleaned the floor with disinfectant, sent him back to bed (I was more abrupt with him than I should have been), and tried to sleep, but couldn't until I'd read for a while. At 5.30am, he was back, to say he'd been sick in his tub. I told him to leave it in the bathroom and find himself another, but again I couldn't sleep. Then Neill came in at 6.30; he'd just discovered that James had been sick over his panda. At 7.00 I got up and found that he'd also been sick over the bedroom floor, the lego (which I had to wash piece by piece in disinfectant), his sheet, and some

books (fortunately (?) only hard covers, not his pile of Beanos). After this and feeding the other two, I was lucky to get twenty minutes relaxation time before John Burgass came at 9.00, and I was as unprepared as I've ever been for a race.

Then when we got there and went to park in the multi-storey car park, they told us that the start had been changed. We were now being marshalled in one of the other car parks. (The start, we found later, was in one lane of the main road, with traffic coming the other way. Chaotic and stupid, it seemed. But I guessed the reason afterwards. On the map, the second lap had been shorter, and went through a dip in the ground, maybe 10 metres below the rest of the course; my surmise is that it was flooded – in any case, the second lap diversion was not taken, we went round the long way. There must have been some frantic last-minute re-measuring!)

We arrived at the car park with 25 minutes to spare, which should have allowed plenty of time for a warmup; but after I'd done one lap of the car park, they started marshalling us, and then at 5 to 10 led us on a long crocodile out onto the main road for the start.

Abingdon half marathon, 10am

It felt remarkably easy at the start; no breathing problems, surprisingly little jostling. We went through the first mile in 5.29; too fast, but not unduly so. I was surrounded by people who'd started far faster than they should have, and I overtook many quite soon. (Indeed, after the race settled down, only two people passed me, and I subsequently took one of those.) Perhaps experience counts here. After that, I settled down to a remarkably steady 5.42 per mile for the next six miles. (The only exception was the six mile marker which I passed in 34.05, five seconds slower than I expected; but I was back on schedule at the seventh mile in 39.41.) It was a lovely course; after we turned off the busy main road, it was a moderate-sized urban road, which then headed out through the country to Drayton, and then a tiny country road to Sutton Courtenay and across the river to Culham. The sun shone, moderated by small clouds in the blue sky; trees were in blossom, especially at the river bridges; the breeze was a light northerly, noticeably against us in the closing stages of each lap but not too much of a problem even then.

I ran along counting how far under 6min/mile schedule I was getting, and wondering when the effects of last night would blow me sky-high, slightly nervous at the pace. (I estimate that I was about a minute faster at 10km than I was at Carterton last year.) Then, after seven miles, with the wind at my back, I actually increased the pace, and did it in style, catching the group who had been out of

contact ahead. and burning off runners with powerful kicks. I reached 10 miles in 56.24, having speeded up to 5.35/mile for those three miles. Though I couldn't escape the slight nervousness, I couldn't refrain from doing it; I was running strongly here and just ran at the pace that came quite naturally. At 10½ miles I started to tire a bit, especially as we turned into the wind for the second time, but I still kept pulling in runners, though it was at about 12½ miles that someone went past me, running so strongly that I didn't really mind.

The finish crept up on me and took me by surprise. Remembering a long run-in on grass from three years ago, I turned off the road into the park, and only then realised that, in doing so, I had gone under a big banner saying "Finish". Once I realised that, I stopped my watch on 74.32, so it was probably about 74.30 in point of fact (pending an official time, if they send one). I think my place was 26th. This means that, despite the fatigue and wind near the end, the pace only dropped to 5.50/mile. I certainly can't complain about that!

That is a very pleasing run. I didn't feel as elated, afterwards, as I might have expected; perhaps, somewhere, I knew that it could have been even faster, but it is so much faster than the pace I have got used to (nearly 40sec/mile faster than Witney last year) that I couldn't expect to do better. In keeping with this, I was much less distressed after the race than after any previous half-marathon, with scarcely more stiffness than after a hard training run.

John finished in about 84 minutes. The first woman home, from Oxford City club, took 82 mins and something; and the first man, 67 mins and something. That suggests the real significance of this run – it is the first time this side of 35 that I've turned in a performance of which I wouldn't have been ashamed at the age of 18 or 20.⁵⁸

Monday 13/4/87

Well, the adverse effect of Saturday night mightn't have shown itself in my running, but it struck immediately afterwards!

Today we all went to Milton Keynes, where I had to drag the children all round the shopping centre while Sheila worked. We actually persuaded then to have lunch in a Japanese restaurant afterwards, where Neill pronounced the food

⁵⁸Tucked into my diary here was a page from *Running* magazine, showing the first vet to be D Parsons (Oxford City) and the first woman S Walters (Oxford City); also, two weeks earlier, the winner of the White Horse Half-marathon was S Cowles (Oxford City). When I joined Oxford City later in the year, Dave, Sue and Shel were my team-mates, and Dave and Shel in particular were in the Vets road-running team in which I won two AAA silver medals the next two years.

“the best in the universe”, somewhat to his surprise; Hester had some and ate most of it, and even James, who had refused to order, regretted it slightly when he had a taste of the others’ food.

Back home, I felt like running, and persuaded Sheila and Neill to come out. Neill felt tired, and turned back at the Trout. After that we went a little faster, but Sheila felt tired at the ring road bridge on the way back, so I came home alone. The run showed up a couple of slightly stiff spots – inside my thighs, and one shin – but the contrast with the after-effect of previous half-marathons, which have laid me out for weeks, is immense.

But I left out what I meant to say. After I’d changed for my run, I couldn’t find my shoes. I must have forgotten to put them back in my bag after I’d changed out of them after the race. I felt stupid and annoyed. I wrote a letter to the race organiser, asking whether they’d been found, and offering to pay postage and expenses if so, but I’m not hopeful.

The only ray of light is that, having already had a good deal of use from them, I’d worried that they’d be past their best by the London, and had even considered buying another pair! The realisation of absent-mindedness hurts more than the cost. My ZX250s haven’t quite fallen apart, and will do duty for a few days.

Tuesday 14/4/87

My letter of yesterday won’t be on its way until 11am this morning. I can’t expect a reply until after Easter. I can’t put off buying new shoes longer than Tuesday. Of course, if by some miracle they do reappear, they’ll have had a week’s less wear, and might just be OK still!

I really meant to run today. But Sheila, who is supposed to be on holiday and might have been expected to relieve me, went to work today and didn’t get back until fairly late. In self-defence, I spent the day on my jigsaw puzzle of Loondon shops and pubs – very relaxing in some ways, but hard on the eyes and the back – until the children, by dint of ceaseless pestering, induced me to mow the lawn and then make a barbecue. (This, according to Hester, is now a family tradition for the first nice day of Spring; and certainly the weather this afternoon was glorious, even nicer than Sunday: warmer, less breeze, clearer sky.) As a result, I couldn’t go for a run when Sheila got back; she left for squash too soon after I’d eaten; and it was nearly ten when she got back, after picking up some publicity material for Hester’s concert, by which time I was too tired to drag myself out, so we drank coffee with John and did some more of the jigsaw until bedtime.

It is easier to get myself out the front door now than it used to be; but there

are limits to everything. And anyway, maybe it's for the best, two days after such a race as Sunday. But don't let me make a false step now!

Wednesday 15/4/87

While running today, I had a different sort of disorientation. I knew quite well where I was, but seemed to see the activity in a new light. "This is my hobby", I thought in surprise, as if amazed that pounding the grass could be fitted into the same category as, say, James cutting coupons from the newspaper and filling them in with imaginary names and companies.

The run started with a jog to Bishop Kirk with Neill. I thought at first it was shorter than to Wytham, but after finishing, I wasn't so sure. Neill ran even better than before, almost non-stop, in 32 minutes, with no ill-effects apart from a slight stomach ache and overheating a bit (he went out in track suit and jumper on quite a warm day).

Then I went off on the farm circuit, with a couple of additions: I ran along the path towards Eynsham until stopped by a muddy stretch, and in Wytham I ran up the hill and round the village. It was fartlek of sorts. I ran steadily on the straight stretches, paused where there were gates to climb (the fence bordering the lane from the farm to the woods now leans so much that it is very difficult to climb in an anticlockwise circuit) or other obstructions (at the mud path I stopped and talked to a lady on a bicycle who was pressing on to the detriment of a good pair of shoes), and sprinted the hills. From the Wytham T-junction I ran home fast, covering the distance in a creditable 7.15.

It was quite an easy run, and yet the sprints were as fast as ever. I've reached a level of fitness where running, even at quite a good pace, is fun, but trying to go faster than ever before is mental anguish, because the standard required is quite high. But I must do it – in $3\frac{1}{2}$ weeks, quite noticeable changes for better or worse can occur.

Thursday 16/4/87

The weather continues hazy-sun and warm-for-the-time-of-year. Soon it will be impossible to run on the grass verge on Wytham hill; the nettles are already ankle high.

I ran eight repetitions of the hill. The session was faster than usual in overall time, and it wasn't just the recoveries where I gained; I put in some good hard efforts and usually raised the work rate for the final sprint. Important, as I've said

before, not just physiologically but in preparing me for maintaining effort through the pain and fatigue I'll meet in the last few miles.

After finishing, I still felt like a bit more work, so I ran along the road through the lower woods, from the abbey to the gatehouse. Near the farm, daffodils and celandines bloomed by the roadside, and the woods were full of primroses. Leaves are bursting out of buds. When I reached the gatehouse, I saw a sign "Please shut the gate" on the gate, and decided I would shut it, after me. I ran back along the road, timing myself at 3.58 for the measured kilometre, or 6.20 a mile, a pace that felt smooth and effortless.

I am revising downward my estimates of time for the London, in view of last Sunday's performance. Extrapolating both world bests and my own best times for shorter distances suggest a time well under 2.40. *Running* magazine says the last runners may take five minutes to pass the start. In any case, I certainly won't aim at 7 minute miles, but will hope to be going at around 6.15 for the first three-quarters, allowing the inevitability of slowing in the last quarter.

Friday 17/4/87

A terrible warning today about overconfidence.

In the afternoon (about 5.30) of a hot day, I set out on the Bladon circuit. This was after a day of a visit to town (we went to Neill's and James' Good Friday service, and I ran down along the canal towpath because the car was too full – hence the extra couple of miles), a trip to the pub before lunch, and beer and coffee with the Bleaches. Predictably, I started much too fast.

I reached Bladon church in an unprecedented 33.10. By then I was already beginning to blow up. The wind had been more or less neutral until the Bladon roundabout, when it was against me all the way to Cassington; but it wasn't strong, and I blessed it for cooling me down more than I cursed it for increasing my workload. But the story of the run from Begbroke to the end was one of gradual slowing, of mental agony kept within bounds so that thoughts of stopping never came too close to reality, but being reduced to jogging the A40 and coming almost to a standstill on the railway bridge. (54.31 at Cassington bridge, 72.40 at the finish, so it wasn't quite as bad as it seemed.)

I'm sure I'll take the warning to heart. But, on the positive side, I could hardly produce a better simulation of the last eight miles of a marathon within a twelve-mile run, so it should have its benefits too.

While at the Bleaches', I stood up to scan the sky for a plane. I became dizzy and everything went dark, but I narrowly avoided blacking out by sitting down

quickly.

Saturday 18/4/87

Yesterday's debacle took more out of me than it should have, but it gave me the excuse for a day off today, a day of lounging round the house, doing odd things like fixing the table and dismantling the current jigsaw puzzle.

Tonight is a late babysit for Traude and Pat. I am so inside out at the moment, that I haven't used the time for contemplation, or even for working. I read Russell Hoban's wonderful *The Mouse and his Child*, the last half of it simultaneously with the first half of the Hazel O'Connor film *Breaking Glass*, which is compulsive but doesn't fit my mood. I will switch over to rock on BBC1 soon.

This break has been good for me. I intend a long run tomorrow – it is getting close to the point of last chance – though I'm not at all sure whether the social demands of the day will allow it. I have in mind the Newbridge circuit. Watch this space.

Quite a lot of miles this week, but more than usual of low quality. Big gaps, too. But despite the disruptions, I don't think I've lost momentum. The repetition session was very good, and I was fresh after it. And even yesterday had its uses. That crawling along was actually little slower than my best ever over that stretch, and on that theme, I was tired in the last three miles at Abingdon but managed to keep the pace well above 6 minutes a mile there too. Surely a good omen.

Positive scenario: things are on course and, almost regardless of what I do, I'll line up in good shape! Here's hoping, anyway.

Sunday 19/4/87

The rock'n'roll was self-indulgent and boring. America ruins everything. I wish I'd got to bed earlier than 12.45, though.

After church, turkey dinner, and a walk in Wytham Woods, I set out for Newbridge at 4.30, with the wind and rain in my face. I ran at about 6.45/mile pace initially (to Cumnor roundabout). The rain stopped, but at the top of Cumnor Hill I hit another shower. As I passed a building, I thought someone was emptying a bucket of water in the yard, but it wasn't that; a downpour of wet hail hit me a few seconds later. In just a couple of minutes I was soaked through three layers.

In Appleton the wind strengthened and soon brought more rain (I'd been able to watch it approaching from the high ridge). The marked miles took 6.19, 6.21 and 6.27 in strengthening wind and rain, and I reached the bridge in 1.18. Coming

back, the wind dropped, the sun came out for short spells, and I was treated to some glorious views – sunlight on new leaves and a nesting swan with inky clouds behind, pieces of rainbow on Wytham hill. In Eynsham I began to tire, and the pace dropped a bit (still not too badly); I finished in 2.35, 19½ minutes from Cassington bridge.

After the run I felt quite ill; and an hour later, with much discomfort, up came all my half-digested turkey.

I'd noticed, too, on the run, how much harder on my feet my old shoes were. I'll have to get new ones on Tuesday if there is no sign of mine from Abingdon by then.

One final observation. The signs that, last time, I misread as "Lynch hill ferry", came out correctly as "... fishery" this time.

Monday 20/4/87

Some sums on yesterday. This is not just crystal ball gazing; I need to know at what speed to start, I haven't checked that it's 23 miles yet, but let's assume that. Then the pace comes out at 6.45/mile overall.

Comparing Abingdom with two preceding runs on Bladon circuit, my race performance was 10 sec/mile faster than a training run in good conditions, 20sec/mile faster than a run in poor conditions. Assuming the same margins for twice the distance, I might expect to run at 6.25/mile overall, which would give a time of 2.48 (plus 5 minutes, say, for the start). This also suggests that I will indeed, as I guessed, have to aim for an early pace of 6.15 to 6.20 per mile.

Today Sheila ran in the Kidlington 10km fun run. She ran it in 52.04, coming 24th out of about 40: a better performance than Witney a year and a half ago, I think, though I don't have a record of her time then. The children all ran in the children's races; Neill and James took 3.34 and 3.47 respectively for 2 laps, Hester 5.37 for 3 laps. (The laps were claimed to be 400 metres, though they looked longer to me.)

The men's winning time was 31.47, and the veterans' winning time (and course record) somewhere around 32.40 – not totally out of reach, if I worked at it!

We considered again the possibility of joining a club (probably Kidlington); but their training days are Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays, so as a family we couldn't hope to get more than one a week regularly.

Tuesday 21/4/87

I didn't run today either, though I had fully intended to. But it just didn't work out that way. I got my exercise by walking about four miles and digging the garden, both a result of the way we spent the day.

We went out to Beckley to see the Galligans⁵⁹. We took a picnic, in case they were away or busy; but they were neither, and their huge garden with its stunning views over Otmoor was quite big enough to picnic in with them. Added to this, the village pond, just across the street from their house, was being emptied for a long overdue clean and rebuild. The children were delighted, and spent the day "saving" tadpoles and fish from the mud and putting them in tubs and buckets of water, with Francesca and Finbar and several other village children.

After our picnic (with several glasses of wine) Sheila and I set off for a walk. Whenever I walk or run on Otmoor, I always end up going further than I intended, because possibilities for short cuts are so severely restricted by the drainage ditches. So it was this time. Neill came with us and kept up a remarkably good pace with very little complaining, but it took us an hour and a quarter to go down Otmoor Lane, along the dike towards Oddington, along the first possible turn-off to Noke, and back through Noke Wood. The wildflowers were a joy – primroses, cowslips, wood anemones, bluebells, and masses of violets on the stream banks.

Denis gave us a couple of plum trees. This meant, when I got home, quite a bit of digging to clear space for them, after which I was too tired to run.

Wednesday 22/4/87

I bought some new shoes today. I'm back to Adidas; this pair are I don't know what name, but very light and springy (and hopefully will keep their spring for $2\frac{1}{2}$ weeks!) This was done down town shopping, followed by lunch at the Museum of Modern Art – one and two-thirds delicious burritos, with chick pea salad, wonderful food but not light.

Thus it wasn't easy to squeeze in a run between getting home and Jacinta coming at 4. I didn't set out until 3.20. I'd revised my estimate of how far to go down from 15 miles to 10 (thinking of Cumnor hill) when I set off. But then, after Wytham, I decided to cut further, and just do the roundabout. I immediately put on a lot of speed, but the outward leg was still as a result not terribly fast, at 17.12.

⁵⁹Denis, fellow Queenslander and law tutor at Jesus College, Oxford; Martha; and their children Francesca and Finbar.

But coming back, I kept or improved the faster pace (3.25 for the measured km), and got back in 15.50, of which only 7.04 was from the T-junction.

This is a very good run, just what I needed to cheer me up. The 33.02 overall is still 13 seconds inside my previous best for the course, which I had regarded as a hard time to match; now, in view of the start, I must call it soft! It is good evidence that I have the strength and speed that I need, that the work on Wytham hill has paid off. And I needed a boost, after the last few sessions.

For supper we had Neill's choice, yakitori and clear soup. When it was being prepared, he moaned that it wasn't the same as the restaurant, but in the end all the kids ate it with much more enjoyment than I'd expected; a very good omen.

Thursday 23/4/87

I have a certain amount of re-acclimatisation to do. There is no doubt that, after nearly nineteen years in England, I have grown used to the wet and the cold, and that even a moderately warm day will affect my performance adversely.

Today was the first day this year when this re-acclimatisation could take place. It was the first day warm enough for me to go out without a T-shirt or vest; I was quite comfortable. I ran a good session of repetitions on Wytham hill, 8 times up the hill. In the late afternoon warmth, the green by the roadside was growing almost visibly.

Earlier in the day, I walked into the lunchroom and found the running librarian there: she immediately said to me, "You've been training – I can tell by your muscle tone." She was, though, quite impressed when I told her how fast I ran at Abingdon. I don't think I've lost any weight (though I haven't checked for a long time, must do so!), but it certainly has redistributed itself; all my trousers are starting to fall down unless I do the belts up uncomfortably tight.

Time is really getting short now. Two weeks from yesterday, the pre-race registration begins.

One of the day's excitements, which impressed the kids very much, was the news in this month's *PCW* that Mike Mudge awarded me the month's prize for the postage stamp problem. Old news presumably; it's just that I hadn't been in to work for a while to pick up the magazine. I assume that "prize" is not used in any literal sense, or I would have seen or heard something by now. But I'm very pleased with myself anyway!

Friday 24/4/87

The hot weather continues. I ran Cumnor Hill. It was a good run, that left me not exhausted but quite tired, as if I had run the best out of myself. I took a minute and a quarter off my time on the windy day last month, though the gain was all on the way out (understandable in view of the wind then). The splits were 17.37, 30.05. 41.27 and 58.06, and the measured kilometres were 3.46 out and 3.35 back (roughly 6min and 5.45 per mile).

My new shoes blistered my heel slightly. (I should perhaps have done them up a little tighter.) Also, I could distinctly feel the road through them. This is not going to be a good feeling after 26 miles. I hope that they and my feet will have become better friends in two weeks' time. They are fast and light, and look smaller than any pair I've had for a long time. I think they must be racing shoes. I'd like to run 10km in them when I was fit and fast. I might in any event have to get something more substantial for training. I wish I had my Windrunners back!

I noted my weight: I have indeed lost a few kg. I'm eating about the same now as when I was unfit, although just after I started training in earnest I was much less hungry than usual. If my theory is correct, once I started training I became more in touch with my body and observed that I was a bit overweight, hence reduced food intake to cope. But there is a lead time for all these things. Were I to stop running, now or after London, I would probably put the weight back on before readjusting my food intake.

Should I join Kidlington running club? I am not at all sure how keen I will be after London; but then is the time to take action on that, if ever. Meanwhile the form lies around and tempts me.

Saturday 25/4/87

An easy day today, though not an idle one. By way of warmup, after shopping at Sainsbury's and having an early lunch, we took the boys for a little outing in the country, to the crossing over the Evenlode between Combe and East End that I found while running. (Hester took a nap – she was exhausted after her sleepover party at Maddy's followed by choir practice.) Then, when we got back, James did a good bike practice – he went three times up and down the road on the meadow, with me running beside him of necessity, since he still has trouble starting. Then I took Neill for a little run. We went along the footpath beside Goose Green until it joins the canal towpath, then a little further, to Duke's Lock; then we climbed the steps onto the A40 and ran back via the roundabout. (Neill said it was a bit less

than his usual run because he wasn't feeling quite well today.) Back home I left him and took myself off the other way, running to the University Farm via Hester's Bridge⁶⁰ and back via Wytham. On the way back, I did a couple of sprints, from Wytham along the straight, and from the ring road bridge to Godstow bridge. In the first, I was moving faster than for a long time, save perhaps on that very windy day in Victoria Park. Those sprints raised a sweat, and with them, I got back from Wytham in a respectable $7\frac{1}{2}$ minutes despite the slowness of the rest of the run. So it was satisfactory. Then, in the evening, it was a hands and knees job, scrubbing the kitchen floor. I'm not looking forward to the bit that comes next, painting it with polyurethane varnish.

I felt very good for most of the day, better than for several weeks.

Sunday 26/4/87

This morning was misty, with visibility only a couple of hundred yards on the meadow. I set off to run the Bladon circuit. At Peartree, I got really lost. The sensation of not knowing where I am, a familiar one now, came over me, but wasn't dispelled as quickly as usual. I saw a sign pointing to Cowley and Abingdon, and wondered for a while if this unfamiliar roundabout was somewhere on the ring road. Anyway, I crossed over one road and carried on along the next, and a few moments later, I'd found myself again.

I went at quite a good pace, but much slower than the suicide pace of last time. Yet the miles flew by under my feet. I reached Bladon church in 33.47, my fastest ever except for that time. Then, on the dream stretch, where the visibility was a bit further, I put on effort and upped the pace quite a bit (not quite like yesterday's sprints, but in that direction), and reached Cassington bridge in 53.37. On the next bit, I managed to keep a good pace. On the final stretch, from just before the canal bridge on the A40, I began to tire, and felt the urge to drop down a gear; but I managed to keep working hard. A final sprint over the bridge into Wolvercote gave me a time of 70.29.

This may be the fastest I ever run that circuit. It was done when I was very fit and the conditions were good. After London there will certainly be a let-down. Maybe I'll never get back to this level; but if I do, I'll be older and slower. Still, I can be quite pleased with that run, though as there is no exact measurement it cannot really be compared with anything else.

I carefully warmed down afterwards. Only two weeks!

⁶⁰Our name for the footbridge over Wytham stream near the University Farm.

Monday 27/4/87

The first day of term: back to the routine of travelling on the train, lecturing, seeing students, refereeing papers, and so on. As a result, I didn't get to run; but, indeed, the typical pattern last term was that Monday was a rest day, and I'm happy with that.

I still have a noticeable blister on my right heel as a result of the new shoes. It isn't too bad, and I'm hoping that, at worst, it will clear up during the lay-off before the race. What happens during the race won't matter too much.

Yesterday, after the run, my exertions weren't over, by any means – and I don't just mean cooking the Sunday lunch. I did quite a bit of gardening – digging a couple of beds, mowing the lawn, weeding the path (that, surprisingly, was such hard work that I had to stop), making a bonfire . . . Then Traude came for a drink, and the three of us consumed a bottle of wine, and later Angus and Anna, and the four of us finished off two more bottles (and Sheila and Anna didn't drink very much). But even that quantity had little effect, for good or ill, on me. And then there was furniture shopping and varnishing the kitchen floor, the last coat after Angus and Anna had gone and I had gone through the rigmarole of putting the house to bed.

I've been thinking some more about pace. I keep bouncing about from great thoughts of the magic 2.40 (which would be 6.05/mile) and, at the other end, just getting under 3 hours (at 6.55/mile). I think that last Sunday week proves, if anything, that I can run a marathon in under 3 hours. If the distance really is 23 miles, I ran them at 2.55 pace for the full marathon distance. I intend, sometime, to measure it again on the map. (I must admit to some disappointment that it wasn't faster.)

Tuesday 28/4/87

Further on pace. The question I pondered today is whether to estimate my speed in comparison to a baseline of 6.00/mile or 6.30/mile. I have decided on the former, for two reasons. First, my brain may be addled towards the end, or if not, then certainly I may not have spare energy for complicated sums; so stick to the easy one! Second, the time lost at the beginning obviously cannot be made up, but it would be encouraging to see this "end effect" dwindle away as quickly as possible. An aspect of both of these is keeping errors all of the same sign; it is very likely that some miles will be faster than 6.30 and some slower.

Today I did my usual repetition session on Wytham hill. It was another beauti-

ful day (though the forecasters say that we have only one more day of this glorious weather) and the nettles by the roadside were already nearly knee-high. I did a very good session. It was, by some way, my fastest session, and I think not only because of the recoveries. I floated up the hill, fast but easily, for the first five repetitions. In the sixth, about halfway up, my legs gave out on me. (I'd lost concentration momentarily, thinking about dock leaves.) My thoughts at the time were, if this happened halfway through a marathon, I wouldn't finish (nonsense, of course). In the seventh, my wind gave out at the same point. But the last one went fine.

This seems to suggest, at any rate, that these few days of warm weather have re-acclimatised me quite satisfactorily. In fact, the feeling of invulnerability going out for a run in Pasadena or Sydney came back to me. Should I pray for sun on Sunday week? I think anything but wind would suit!

Wednesday 29/4/87

The winter of 1967 is one I would like to forget because of its disastrous end, but I think there are some things to note from that season. I've usually skipped it in reading my training book, but today I read it.

The main events:

23 May: Inter-Varsity 10000m, third in 31.20.8. This was only 10 seconds behind the winner, a UQAC record, and 2 seconds faster than the Australian junior record (set in the same race).

Two days later, 4th in the 5000m in 15.04.5; two days after that, back in Brisbane, 3rd in the Q'ld cross-country team trials.

11 June: 5th in a 15 mile road handicap in 83.28; 43.28 for the first 8 miles. (Linear interpolation gives 54.54 for 10 miles.)

6 days later: a bad performance in the Australian cross-country championships in Launceston, partly due to a very bad cold.

24 June: 8th in the Q'ld 10 mile road championships in 57.56. (Still suffering from the cold; also, the day after the College formal.)

23 July: 19 miles of a marathon. Timings: 29:53 at 5 miles. 59.59 at 10 miles; 91.15 at 15 miles. So the end came very quickly! My notes show that I recovered quickly.

By contrast, I went through 10 miles in 56.24 at Abingdon.

Today, I had very bad indigestion all afternoon – perhaps the pie I ate at lunch was off – and ran at 9pm in the evening, not very long after supper. Not surprisingly, I got a stitch very early on, and had it or a stomach cramp all the way. I would have been very upset if I hadn't run a fast time, but with all of this trouble, the rough road surfaces, and the dark, it was clearly well below the best of which I was capable. My time was 34.51, after having reached the point in 18.32.⁶¹

Thursday 30/4/87

Comment on 1967:

First, and obviously, I sank in just four weeks from an outstanding performance to a dismal one, due in part no doubt to my mental state, though there were mitigating factors. But it wasn't entirely one-way: I did well in various three-milers during that season, winning some and beating some people who beat me in longer races. It was my first venture into distances longer than 10km. And also, though the track 10km is far better than I'm running at present, the road 10 miles is substantially worse, and the 15 miles (which I've always regarded as a high spot) only slightly better. And the fact that, even later in the season, I could run the first 15 miles of a marathon at 6min/mile pace, much less well prepared than I hope to be now, suggests that at my peak fitness I could have sustained a pace close to that.

Sixteen hours after last night's run, I set off from QMC up the towpath, along the Hertford Union and up the river Lea, to just beyond where I got to on 22 January, in 5 min less (though the conditions obviously have a lot to do with that). I was running with the wind going out and into it coming back, a strong enough wind that having to cope with it on Sunday week would be bad news, though it didn't affect my speed very much. The one real worry was my blistered heel. It was especially noticeable towards the end and when running uphill (when toe strike caused the shoe to shift a bit). Also, I was a little bit stiff, so soon after last night. I think I've now earned a rest day tomorrow.

⁶¹My diary doesn't say, but I think this was down Banbury Road to the point in St Giles' where the war memorial stands, and back on the Woodstock Road.

Friday 1/5/87

I took the plaster off my blister last night. Not a pretty sight! Lots of spongy white skin, partly torn away by the plaster partly torn by rubbing against the shoe while not healed. But I put some cream on it and left it open to the air. and today it seems very much better. A day's rest should nearly fix it, I think.

Coming early to Paddington this afternoon, I looked for a magazine. They had *Today's Runner*, and I glanced at its 7-day countdown to the London Marathon. Their prescription for Sunday was 10–15 miles at $1\frac{1}{2}$ mins/mile slower than race speed! At this point I gave up in disgust. Even at my unfittest, I'd die of boredom running the Bladon circuit in 95 minutes or the ring road in 2 hours 5 minutes.

I found a slightly better running magazine unexpectedly in *New Scientist*. This contains an article by one R. McNeill Alexander who had demonstrated that half the energy expended in a stride is saved as elastic potential energy in the Achilles tendon (35%) and the arch of the foot (17%). So what's new? Newsholme and Leech point this out, perhaps without such precise figures or reference to the arch of the foot. Conclusion: exercises to keep these structures elastic! He also points out that running shoes which act as shock absorbers rather than springs may waste much of this energy, and recommends shock-absorbing heels and elastic soles (which is exactly what my ZX250s have!) There is also an incoherent news item about running shoes, and a report on *Biomechanics of Running Shoes* ed. B. Nigg, Human Kinetics Publ., Champaign, 1986.

I took the cotton thread to the map to measure the Newbridge circuit. It came out as $38\frac{1}{4}$ km, only a hair under 24 miles, which is good news!

Saturday 2/5/87

As that otherwise illiterate article in *NS* said, running shoes do change the way you run, and different shoes change it in different ways. It is this, combined with their need to be broken in, that makes new shoes so difficult. I really notice the effect of my latest pair when I'm running round a sharp bend: I have to think about placing my feet, instead of letting them find their own places.

I was also very aware of my shoes today coming over Godstow bridge on the way home, when the right shoe, which had been slipping, began taking skin off the blister. Since I was nearly home by then, I kept going, but this mustn't happen with twenty miles to go!

I ran a couple of miles with Neill first, today, up the canal towpath to the disused railway bridge and back. It was sunny, with light cloud, and sufficiently

warm that he removed his jumper. Then I set out alone for Wytham woods. By the ring road, a fierce wind had sprung up in my face, and snowy-looking clouds were racing over the hill, soon to obscure the sun. I thought history was about to repeat itself; but the passing of the cold front had more effect on the sky than the earth. The first wave of clouds obscured the sun for a while, but didn't precipitate anything; and by the time I'd reached the start of the downhill, it was already far to the east, and the plain of Oxford, with Beckley and Headington hills behind it, was dappled with sunshine and cloud shadow, with the Chilterns, still in clear sun, visible in the far distance. The only effect of the front was to make it a bit cooler, windier and less sunny, though worse followed later.

I ran the circuit very easily, in 47.11 (a dash back from the T-junction covered this part in just 7.01). It was the ease, rather than the speed, that was really pleasing.

Sunday 3/5/87

As if in further illustration of yesterday's point, when I set out today, with a thick plaster, two socks on my right foot, shoelaces in the outside holes and done up tightly, my lower legs felt stiff and the running was awkward. For much of the way, I could feel lopsidedness between my two feet; and, at one point, this induced a cramp in my left calf muscle, but it went away after a bit of rubbing. But the unevenness continued. I also had a touch of stomach cramp. But, for all that, it was neither too slow nor too unpleasant.

I set out the other way on the ring road, making for the Forest Hill to Islip road. There was a cold strong wind from the northeast or north which made the going difficult; so I abandoned my planned route through Elsfield and went via Woodeaton instead. Halfway along the road, I was startled by a loud and long high-pitched alarm followed by a gunshot. I've got used to the sound of shots in the country on Sunday mornings, like lids being slammed on boxes, but the alarm and the nearness made it more than usually sinister.⁶²

The next stretch was uneventful, with the wind no longer in my face. I hadn't realised how steep and narrow is the valley where the Ray bursts through the hills between Noke and Islip. The stretch along the main road was very unpleasant. The grass had grown so high that I had the choice of running on the road edge with my back to the traffic, or leaping through the grass like a gazelle. I got back in 82 minutes or so, the last stretch being better.

⁶²A bird scarer.

After a soak in a bubble bath, I felt much better, and lunch made things better still. I did no further damage to my blister; the precautions worked!

Monday 4/5/87

One thing that has changed over more than half my life is my style of keeping a training diary. I didn't keep one at school, and the first one starts on 29 December 1963. The first week runs thus:

- Dec. 29th – 5 miles slow
- 30th – 4 × 880 yds. average 2.28
- 31st – no training (slight illness)
- Jan. 1st – 6 × 440 yds. average 66 (very encouraging)
- 2nd – no training
- 3rd – no training
- 4th – **Q'ld trials, mile U17**: At the start, I was pushed round a very fast first lap but took the lead and kept it to win from my old rival Woodriff of Downlands. In the 3rd and 4th laps I felt distressed probably due to heat and fast 1st lap. *Time* 4.40.3. *Place* 1st. *Laps* 65, 73, 74, 68.

Something that hasn't changed is my tendency, back then, to mention that I'd been walking, surfing, playing touch football, or whatever, if I hadn't been running or needed an excuse to myself.

Today, I thought I wouldn't run; we walked the five mile loop in Wytham woods instead. The bluebells were marvellous, even better than on Saturday. Then later, I did after all go out, for an intentionally gentle run (I wore my good track suit top, and had no intention of getting it sweaty). I ran along the Cassington footpath as far as the A40, through the loose soil and thousands of cowslips of the water-meadow by Cassington stream, in the warmest part of the day (a chill wind that had assaulted us on top of Wytham had dropped), and back by the road.

My blister is almost better, but I still have a bit of stiffness and soreness in shins and ankles, and my toenails are not in terribly good order, with a little blister on one toe. I wish I knew how to restore the elasticity in my ankles!

Tuesday 5/5/87

I had another rest day today; not quite an enforced rest, but it would have been awkward to run, since I had to lecture at 2pm and then pick James up at 6.15 when

Neill went for his first clarinet lesson. I feel better for it; the blister has almost completely metamorphosed into a lump of hard skin, and the stiffness around the ankles is noticeably less than it was. I will anticipate one hard run tomorrow and the only the lightest of running for the rest of the week.

Yesterday evening I did some yoga and kum nye exercises, the first for a long time. I did them because I felt I wanted to, partly as a result of having done a few stretching exercises while out on my run yesterday. (The retracing-my-steps syndrome again.) They felt natural and right. Afterwards I meditated for a while, but I was too tired; mostly the effect of the disruptions of the last couple of days (the Bonn choir concert, the party afterwards until nearly midnight, and then the early waking to get our guests out in time to catch their coach). Anyway, I kept losing concentration and drifting off into weird dream-fantasies, so I gave up on it and went to bed.

At Paddington I got more vitamin C, in 200mg tablets. I've had a slight sniffle for a couple of days, and I certainly don't want that kind of trouble now! Also I bought the Children's Bible tht Sheila had noticed in a children's bookshop there. I don't like the pictures, which are far too literal (e.g. the four horsemen of the apocalypse as four tired men on tired horses standing still), but the text is good; they've used the King James version for the psalms and the Song of Songs.

Wednesday 6/5/87

I did more or less what I had expected today. On setting out I planned to do repetitions on Wytham hill and finish up by running the road circuit through the woods. The repetition session was a scorcher. I started off at just perceptibly over 5 mins per circuit, and then speeded up; then in the last two I changed gear, got up on my toes, and flew, so that the last circuit only took 4.42! There was just a bit of stiffness in my right ankle, but I could override it. Afterwards, I decided to enjoy myself by running on forest paths instead. So I took the first turn right off the road and ran round near the edge of the forest, enjoying the celandines, bluebells, dappled sunlight, and many shades of green. At one point I startled a herd of a dozen or so deer under the trees. Further on, I came to a stupendous sight: acres of bluebells, growing as thick as wheat, under the young beeches.

I ran up the hill and along the road for a while, and then took the road that doubles back just past the huge beech trees. It took me back through a belt of trees and then across the sheepfield behind the car park, open to the sky, its close-cropped grass starred with dandelions. And so down the hill and home, after the most enjoyable run for a long time.

To complete these nature notes, I saw a cuckoo this afternoon, while cycling home along the towpath. It was calling from a tree in the upper Wolvercote allotments, and flew in front of me across the canal unto the trees by the railway, still singing.

Tonight I phoned Jane Davies about arrangements for the weekend. I have to take the train from Victoria to Herne Hill, and expect to get there late afternoon on Saturday.

Thursday 7/5/87

Registration day.

If one seeks omens in everything, the train this morning (one HST power car pulling conventional rolling stock) did the journey to Paddington in 48 minutes. By 10.15 I was striding over Hungerford Bridge in search of the registration tent. I picked up my number (no identification demanded), last newsletter, and safety pins, bought an official programme (with my name in it) for £1.50, and was showered with brochures, most of which I subsequently dumped.

On a beautiful sunny day (hope it lasts!) I felt elated as I walked across the College to give my lecture. This is good; the mood is building nicely, the unconscious build-up having been timed correctly, despite my conscious apprehension.

The programme has some factual information worth having, for example, maps of the start and finish. But I view the article on relaxing before the race with some suspicion, and I have deliberately not read Gordon Pirie's article on style. The last thing I want now is an unconscious worry about whether I should be running differently. Two other things perturb me. One is the enormous amount of Isostar they are dispensing; I'm not convinced by the physiological arguments for it. The other is Jim Fixx's formula for how far you can run before collapsing. For me, it gives less than 24 miles, which is obviously wrong; for many people, it will be less, and they will be unnecessarily worried.

After getting home I ran to Wytham and back over Hester's Bridge with Neill – he got to Wytham in 14.34 – and then had a brisk run by myself, down the towpath to Aristotle Lane and then back across the meadow, where I got very bogged at one point, and got my nice new shoes all muddy.

Friday 8/5/87

That absurdity from Fixx must result from his being quoted out of context. I assume (knowing nothing about what he advocates) that the calculation applies

to people who are “joggers”. i.e. who run comparatively long distances at low speed. Suppose, for example, tht I was doing $12 \times 400\text{m}$, short recovery with warmup and warmdown, four times a week, a race (say 5km) once a week, and a long run (10 miles) once a week. Then, according to his calculation, I couldn't run further than 15 miles without collapsing, even though I would be extremely fit!

I tried a little experiment yesterday. I went to the Adidas stand and stood looking blankly at a wall covered with different running shoes. The assistant came up, and I explained that I needed some information on the capabilities of the shoes. He asked me what I needed them for; I said, “50 miles a week on the road, and I'm fairly heavy.” His hand went straight to the ZX250s, identical to my present ones, even in colour scheme! (I should add that I had also told him that I didn't mind paying, but didn't want the really top-price shoes.)

The weather still holds fair; I hope it will last! Finishing my last lecture early because nobody had any questions, I took a few of the students to the bar and spent the hour sitting in the sunshine drinking lager; I fitted in a quick lunch after the next tutorial. For supper I had a big plate of pasta and tomato sauce. Though I am not yet convinced about carbohydrate loading, it is probably worth a try; anyway, pasta is nice!

Feeling better (in shins and ankles) than yesterday; only a trace of stiffness.

Saturday 9/5/87

The weather still holds perfect, and the forecast is encouraging: it may get just a little cooler, they say, but it will stay fine. I feel good. I drifted around the house and around Summertown, lazily, not exerting myself but getting done what had to be done. I did a session of yoga and kum nye, finishing in the savasana, where I lay on the floor of the upstairs front room for a quarter of an hour or so, relaxed but not quite dozing.

As so often before a race, various little twinges obtrude into consciousness, but none carries any worry.

I think I am, more or less, as fit as I've ever been. According to all the pointers, I'm capable of under 2.40. The programme has a conversion chart which matches 15.04 for 5000m, 31.48 for 10000m, 1.11.18 for half marathon, and 2.30 for the full marathon. This is the level of my best performances, though I wasn't trained then for long distances. But regular racing would have improved my 1.14.30 at Abingdon by a couple of minutes; indeed, I'm hoping that the experience of that run and four more weeks of training will cut it down to the equivalent of, say, 1.12

or 1.13, translating into 2.32 for a marathon. Allowing some for my inexperience, I'm still in with a chance! I'll know when I start running tomorrow.

Evening, at Davies': ate lots of spaghetti and perhaps too many fruit and nuts afterwards. Talked lots, hence less self-contained than on the journey down. But things seem OK, and I can only see what the morning will bring. Brian told me about some remarkable results by Varopoulos about growth rates in finitely-generated groups, that he heard in Edinburgh this week.

Sunday 10/5/87

I set my alarm for 6.30, but was awake comfortably before that, giving myself time to come gently awake before getting up. I had three slices of toast, juice, and two cups of coffee, and talked again about mathematics with Brian before it was time for us to leave at 7.45.

He'd estimated half an hour to drive there, perhaps longer if the roads were congested; but, despite missing a turn and coming first to the blue start, he was able to drop me at the gate soon after 8.00. (Though it was fairly busy near the start, the roads all the way were Sunday-morning deserted.)

With this, and having to have my baggage on the coach before 9.00, as well as being unable to sit still for very long, I did a very protracted warm-up: some stretching yoga, jogging up and down, more stretching, round the field and stride-throughs, more stretching. By then, crowds were starting to build up at the markers. I dutifully went to the 2hrs 50mins marker, and found myself in a crowd with a high proportion of clowns, OAPsm and others who clearly hadn't a prayer of doing that time. All the while, loud music was blaring from a speaker just over my head, giving little chance to concentrate as the time for the start drew near.

London Marathon, 9.30am

The firing of the gun was something of a non-event. We didn't even get up to walking pace until after we crossed the start line with the clock showing 1.04. My best estimate is that the start cost me two minutes. I took every opportunity to pass, though only once did I jostle anybody; one person took umbrage but was soon lost in the pack.

Once I got moving, at about the 1 mile point (reached in 7.55), I was running a fairly even pace of a few seconds over 6min/mile; not as consistently as Abingdon, due to the huge crowds and the hillier terrain. The runners swayed from side to side of the road, following the blue line; I tried to keep to the right-hand edge,

which meant that sometimes I had half a road to myself, but if I didn't concentrate, I got boxed in. But I continued to overtake people quite steadily until Tower Bridge, where I passed the 12 mile marker in 1.14.12.

All along the way, at least until about 20 miles, was a giant street party: bands of every sort (jazz, rock, steel, . . .), amplified music (typically playing depressing tunes like "Nowhere to run", or "Baby give it up"), people offering off their own bat drinks, glucose sweets, slices of orange, or just hands to touch as we went past. I indulged in the last of these, and took water several times from drink stations, though I didn't drink much, rather using it to rinse my mouth and spray on my head and neck. The weather was, as the forecasters had said, warmish, though cooler than yesterday, and with a noticeable (though not troubling) wind.

The only sour note in the first half (indeed, in the whole race after the start) was an obviously wrong 3 mile marker, which suggested that I'd slowed to between 6.30 and 6.40 for the third mile. I decided later that it was for the blue start, who were then running parallel to us but hadn't merged. But what an unfortunate place to get wrong!

After Tower Bridge, the going got harder. Not badly at first; I eased up on the effort but kept the pace fairly high for several more miles. But at 15, the work began to get harder, and the pace went down significantly – first to 6.30, then to not much under 7.00. But by that time, my brain was so addled that I couldn't keep clear track of time. I passed 20 miles in somewhere around 2.03.15, and kept just inside 7 min/mile pace on average to the finish, but I was so confused that at one point I even thought that I wouldn't get under 3 hours. Of course, thoughts of dropping out crossed my mind, but the crowds were so solid and supportive in the last four miles that there was never any danger of that. I'd worn my Iffley Road Strollers T-shirt;⁶³ and many times along the route, I got a cheer because of this, even once from one of the race marshalls. This also was immediately cheering.

The carpet over the cobbles at the Tower was, in my opinion, a failure. It was so soft and dead that it broke my rhythm much more than the reasonably flat cobbles themselves would have done; so I moved off it back onto the cobbles.

After that, it was one foot after another until the 25 mile marker, when I managed to lift the pace a bit.

Coming over the bridge, I saw the clock ticking away towards 2.47 and, with a great effort, managed to beat that minute by one second.

⁶³This informal group was founded by Charles Wenden, bursar of All Souls College and a timekeeper for Roger Bannister's four-minute mile; its chief activity was putting a team in the Otmoor Challenge Half Marathon every year. I was in this team six or seven times.

After the finish, drink was the first requirement. Like Geoffrey Firmin in *Under the Volcano*, I took everything that was going – water, orange juice, lots of Isostar, a beer, a milk shake; and, after I got home, more water, tea, more beer. I was still sweating at 10pm. But I wasn't very hungry. I couldn't even eat my Mars bar⁶⁴ until two hours after the race.

During the race I'd been aware of a stiff right ankle and a pain in the left calf which, fortunately, turned into stiffness rather than cramp. I don't think these slowed me. Afterwards, my left foot went twice into mild cramp on Hungerford Bridge (to the surprise of a policeman). My toes are slightly blistered too. But otherwise, little ill effect.

I can't really be proud of 2.46.59. This is 6.22/mile pace (or 6.17, allowing for the start). I don't think it would have been significantly faster if I'd started at a slower pace; I would still have got tired in the last few miles, and wouldn't have had so much concrete achievement up my sleeve. The point is that all my training had only got me fit to run 20 miles. What it had done, though, was to condition me not to give up and let the pace crash when I got tired. If I ever run another marathon, that is what will require more work.

Many people asked me, after the finish, whether I would want to run another. The fact that I didn't immediately react "Never again!" means that probably I will. I'm sure I'm capable of a better time. I'll know, another time, to start unashamedly at the front of the pack. I wouldn't expect to improve on 6.04/mile for 20 miles; it is the last bit that needs work. But how? Should I run over-distance? I always felt that this would be, not merely advisable, but mandatory; I let myself be influenced by magazine articles suggesting that 15 miles might be sufficient. But now I know I can keep going, the problem is to keep the pace up; and 24 miles is probably about right for that. I should, say, run Newbridge circuit aiming to do as good a time back from Eynsham as possible. There is probably a physiological reason why the last 6 miles will always be slower.⁶⁵

In any case, I wasn't the only one to slow after halfway. Ingrid Kristiansen the most notable example, 6 minutes slower in the second half; I was only 2 minutes slower (or 4 allowing for the start!).

⁶⁴Mars were race sponsors in those days.

⁶⁵In fact, I ran the London marathon again the following year; on a hotter day, I was two and a half minutes slower, but nearly a hundred places up the list.

Monday 11/5/87

According to this morning's *Times*, I did achieve my other ambition, of getting in the first thousand. It put me 957th and confirmed that my time was 2.46.59.

Frankie phoned up to congratulate me. I wore my medal to Hester's choir's concert last night, and raised a bit of comment. (Incidentally, it was a wonderful concert, full of lovely bits, but especially Roddy Williams' music – I especially liked the bass figure in one movement, in 5/4 with a triplet on the third beat, but there were lovely passages for single instruments (oboe, horn) as well – and the choir were truly glorious. Everyone was uplifted by the music; even Neill admitted to it being worthwhile.)

I think that what I have to do now is to see whether I can drop back to a level of training that I can sustain, something round 20–30 miles/week in 3–4 runs. I've never really done that before; I've always been either training for something, or in the middle of a busy season. First, I feel better when I'm fit; and second, it would make the mechanism of training up to a peak for a particular race easier. And in any case, all those miles would surely pay their way.

In any case, several people (Hester this morning, Brian yesterday, among others) have remarked how well I look. I have no compunction in ignoring lunatic outpourings like those of Norris McWhirter who says the insurance company should increase my premiums. (Anyway, he has a lot to answer for – would anyone try two marathons on consecutive days, for example, were it not for the institution he and his brother founded?⁶⁶) I'd like to keep this glow!

⁶⁶*The Guinness Book of Records.*