

Whilst we here in the UK certainly look forward to running during the light summer evenings, the residents of the city of Tromsø (Norway) have the natural conditions to go one step further and host a midnight marathon! The sun doesn't set there from the middle of May until July 19th each year, so a start time of 8:30 p.m. doesn't cause the same sort of logistical problems that it might do over here. The 'Midnight Sun Marathon' is the northern most certified marathon in the world (at almost 70 degrees), and gives runners the rare chance to complete a 26.2 event within the Arctic Circle. The start is in the city centre and the field are taken over the 1K long Tromsø-bridge to the mainland, and after completing about another 20K over there the runners return and run back over the bridge, through the city centre and around the southern part of the island. At this point those shattered bodies will be very pleased to see that they are finally heading back to finish area in the city centre. Joining a highly cosmopolitan group on the start line for this 22nd staging was Stratford AC's very own Richard Dobeodoe, and he made it back to the finish in a fabulous time of 3 hours 4:26 minutes. This placed him 25th out of the 511 male finishers, and he was ranked an excellent 4th in the male 45-49 age category (behind 1 Brit and 2 Italians). Probably more important than all this though was that the Loxley likely lad achieved his main competitive aim for travelling – to get under the 3:15 mark and qualify for a 2012 London Marathon 'Good for Age' spot. With wife Anne competing well in the associated 10K race, finishing in a time of 54:26 (162nd out of 526 women finishers), it turned out to be both a novel and successful weekend away. It will be interesting to see how keen this energetic couple are to return for the city's 'Polar Night Half-Marathon' in January, when runners face the challenge of icy snow and biting cold!

The Warwickshire Road Race League has been zipping along with Stratford AC's own 'Summer 6', which the club are never going to shine in (due to organisational duties), sandwiched by a pair of midweek events - Sphinx's 'Summer 5' in Coventry and BRAT's 5K in Birmingham. First up was the Coventry 5-miler, with the 2011 race taking place in cooler conditions than previous years, and enduring quite a downpour of rain in the hour before the start. There were 266 official finishers undertaking the two 2.5 mile clockwise laps of the Memorial Park on a Wednesday night, and there were 8 SAC athletes who forsook their usual club night run in favour of this short and sharp blast. The club's females continued their impressive showing in the 2011 WRRL races, with in-form Dawn Compton (33:24,78th) – who was 1st F45 – and post-European Tri Champs Emma Bexson (34:14,90th) - 2nd F35 – leading the troops home. Once this pair's results were added to by Ruth Calderbank (39:19,168th) again taking the 1st F55 crown, and Kate Barrett (43:55,212th) notching a fantastic 5-mile PB by a minute – courtesy of setting off hard and not worrying about negative splits – the Stratford ladies made a highly impressive quartet. The 4 SAC males present did their bit to push their team mates to glory, with Martin Todman (34:24,116th) looking strong again as he tried to chase down Dawn and Emma. Martin is starting to show the benefits of a period of injury-free training, something that Mike Barrett (39:31,171st) certainly hasn't had this year, whilst Michael Oliver (41:51,195th) continues powering through a surprisingly frequent race schedule and John Butler (48:22,245th) still looks like he is enjoying his running as much as ever. The 6th race in this year's WRRL was the BRAT 5K (formerly Rowheath 5K), staged in deepest Birmingham and which is always run over an undulating 2-lap course, and which always attracts a good quality field. The race also included the county 5K championships, which it often does, and despite being quite a warm evening the conditions for running were extremely pleasant. The core of the SAC contingent from the Coventry race also made this Thursday evening journey, and after holding off Martin Todman (21:21,89th) by 10 seconds over that 5-miler, the winning gap for Emma Bexson (21:18,86th) came down to 3 seconds at Rowheath! Emma came back as 2nd F35 again, with Martin also featuring well up amongst his M55 peers, whilst the rejuvenated Yvonne Caswell (21:41,97th) was speedy enough to take the 4th F35 slot. Cat Sales (22:06,105th) has been building well on the stamina gained earlier in the year, and Cat was pushed all the way by sparkling performances from two runners definitely on the way up still - Andy Turner (22:35,110th) and Andy Brown (23:09,118th). Ruth Calderbank (23:59,130th) deservedly won the F55 county medal, and the margin of victory shows just how dominant this remarkably modest athlete seems to be at the moment. Luke Watkins (24:11,133rd) ensured that at least some family representation was maintained at this event, Dave Maundrell (24:44,140th) had a controlled try out after long-term injury, Michael Oliver (26:12,151st) maintained his impressive track record in this series and John Butler (29:51,163rd) competed well at a distance that is a tad short for this stamina king.

The overall WRRL standings for the year haven't yet included these BRAT 5K results, but things are still looking bright for SAC's regular participants with quite a few top 10 placings. Emma Bexson lies 2nd F35, and is looking odds-on favourite if she completes the necessary amount of events, Kate Barrett is 7th F35 and Dawn Compton has won the F45 category in all 3 races she has done, but currently lies 'only' 4th from a lack of races. Dawn will probably need to ensure that she gets up to the 6 race mark in order to have a chance of winning, but Ruth Calderbank has won the F55 age group in all 4 of her races and currently stands proudly at the top of the table. John Butler is the only Stratford male in a top 10 position (in the M60 group), which is a great effort considering he is giving away a fair few years to those just turned 60. Emma and Ruth are 3rd and 5th overall females respectively, and in the team standings Stratford are 8th in the men's (7th in the veterans' standings), 2nd in the ladies (only just behind Leamington) and a glorious 1st (ahead of Centurion) amongst the female veterans. Rather bizarrely the very limited number of Stratford AC runners did a superb job in their own 'Summer 6' event, and ensured that not too much ground was lost (and in one or two cases actually gained). If attendance and form (and the injured John Turner's support) continue into autumn then both individual and team WRRL glory beckons for the club!