



John Mackenzie

**Name:** John Duncan Mackenzie

**Born:** 06/09/1954

**Date Joined :** March 1978

**Personal Bests:** (all in the 1980's)

Track

800m 2min 00.1sec

1500m 4min 05sec

3000m 8min 35sec

3000m s/c 9min 42sec

5000m 15min 10sec

10000m 32min 50sec

Road

5 miles 25min 12sec

10 miles 52min 06sec

Half Mar 69min 50sec

20 miles 1hr 47min 48sec

Marathon 2hr 29min 47sec

**First Club Race:** Cambridge 10 1978 (I ran in Frank Heaney's name and he did a pb of 57min 35secs !!! as a veteran)



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**Favourite Race:** Great North Run ( This was an Ilford team favourite and we made it into a weekend away each year for more than 10 years - no anecdotes though! What happened in Newcastle...stayed in Newcastle.)

**Notable Performances:** Always a bit-part player in a fantastic Ilford squad, my best individual race was definitely the Windermere Marathon in 1986 when I finished a very hilly course in 9th position in 2hrs 33mins - which earned me the prize for 1st Southern athlete (my mum was not amused as I am a Mancunian!)

**Biggest Disappointment:** Not gaining an Oxford Blue for cross country or athletics.

**Typical Weeks Training at your peak :**

Mon 8 - 10 miles road

Tues Track session (Summer) or South Park intervals (Winter)

Weds 8-10 miles road

Thurs Track session (Summer) or 9-10 miles speedy road run

Fri 4-5 miles easy running

Sat Race

Sun am 12-15 miles road/country pm 4-5 miles easy running

Target mileage per week was 70 fitting in two runs a day in build-up to marathons.

**Favourite Sessions:** Road -Tomswood Hill 9/10 mile road run ( I'm sure I was faster on Thursday nights than on a Saturday!).

Track - Up and down the clock 200/400/600/800/600/400/200 x 2.

**Favourite race distance:** Marathon

**Favourite event** - Track, Road or Cross Country : Cross Country at Parliament Hill

**What advice would you give our current crop of youngsters :**



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Keep trying to beat the guys who are always ahead of you because you will improve with perseverance and consistently hard training. Enjoy every minute of your running career because you never know how long it will last.

**Who is the most Famous Athlete you Trained with or would like to train with:**

I trained with Julian Goater before he went to the Olympics to do the 10000 metres - a really classy athlete.

**How would you improve the sport -**

Dedicated trail courses like they have in Portugal for training off-road which would reduce stress injuries from all the road work.

**Favourite Athlete or Sportsman:** Dave Bedford (he inspired me to wear red socks) and Steve Ovett.

**What other sports do you follow:**

Football (Man Utd), cricket, golf, road and track cycling, horse racing, triathlon and (in the 1990's ) Sumo wrestling.

**Best Country Visited :** Hawaii

**Favourite Food & Drink :** Real ale/ Chateaubriand steak

**Favourite TV Shows:** X Files, Frasier, 24, The Wire, What they do in the shadows, Book at Bedtime.

**Last Film Seen :** K19 - Widowmaker

**Last Book Read:** Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie

**Favourite Band Singer:** Genesis / U2 /Yes / Roxy Music / David Bowie

**Last Album Bought or Downloaded :** David Bowie - Black Star

**Last Concert Attended:** Jess Glynne at Newmarket Nights

**Any Pets:** No, I have a wife so no room for any other loves in my life. She lets me take her for a walk and gives me lots of cuddles so not required at present!



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**What are your aims for next season:**

To remain injury free and run at 8min mile pace.

**Tell us a Joke:** If athletes get athlete's foot, what do elves get?

Mistle-toes!



Essex Way 2009

Looks like Malcolm Muir just told me after finishing the long 9.5 mile leg 2



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"You're fired!"



19 year old Dave Bedford groupie replete with red socks



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A very lonely late leg on the 1982 Southern 12 stage road relay in Wimbledon





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Not to be outdone by Ernie, here I am being presented to Princess Anne

## Johns follow up questions

**It must have been heartbreaking not to get the full Oxford blue. Who makes that decision and what was the background to it?**

Selection was a bit of a mystery. I think there was an Oxford don from the Oxford Blues Committee made responsible for cross country and athletics. He would make the selection alongside the Oxford University Athletic Club Captain.

During each of my three years I was ever-present at cross country races, normally finishing in the top six of Oxford's contingent. When it came to the Oxford vs Cambridge event, I was travelling reserve in my final year, bumped out of the Blues team by admittedly better runners - including another subsequent Ilford AC member Andy Etchells.

I would have preferred to run the 5000 metres at the equivalent track event but had to settle for the steeplechase for the Oxford University Centipedes (2nd team). Ho hum.

**Who did you like training with the most, and who did you like training with the least, and why?**

The worst person to train with was Adrian Gilham alias 'Spit the Dog' - he gobbed and farted perpetually.



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Our training group in the 1980's comprised of over fifty assorted characters across the decade so this is really tough to single out one 'best' training partner. Mick Herring was metronomic; Derek Coates was chirpy and chatty; Gary Webb was consistently hard-working and fun; but the jewel in the crown was Andy Catton- he led by example and worked so hard giving all of us a target to aim at on each and every training session and race. Awesome!

**I know that you listed U2 as one of your favourite groups ( WEMBLEY 1986 ? ) but I didn't see any mention of your dalliance with ACIIID !!! music in Newcastle. Do you still listen or was that a one off LOL.**

That U2 concert attended with Gary Webb, Ernie 'The Edge' Forsyth, and Ian Bishop was brilliant...and I still haven't found what I'm looking for!

At Newcastle's 'The Boat' nightclub, after 6/7 pints I found the revolving dance floor in the main disco room too challenging so opted for the ACID dance floor where the rapid strobe lights made it look as though I was moving to the music!

**I know that you are a fan of author James Harper but who would be your favourite author.**

The author James Harper (aka Tim Heaney) is my current Chigwell Row training partner. He writes much better than he runs!

My favourite author is Sebastian Faulks (introduced to me by Club Elder - Gerry Pells) - his novel Birdsong is just magnificently moving.



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**Did your daughters Charlotte and Laura show any promise as young athletes or did they decide that dad was mad enough on his own.**

Took them to a Met League cross country race to watch and they never got over having witnessed the sight of one of my team mates changing for the race - he was forever branded ' Micky Hairy BumBum' thereafter!

Both my girls showed good style at school sports etc and I even ran with each of them in the Brentwood 3 mile Fun Run (raced alongside the Half Marathon), Both suffered with stitch and never forgave me for bullying them into continuing to run despite their discomfort. Charlotte now runs and cycles for fitness whilst Laura has been a dancer since she was 4 and does the occasional jog.

**I noted your great performance at the Windermere Marathon, was it on the course that was later declared too short or was it ratified as true distance ( tongue firmly planted in cheek). did you ever do the UMBONGO FUN RUN which was Les Hislop's finest hour**

Les Hislop's victory in the Umbongo Fun Run is the stuff of legends- a finely-tuned veteran athlete giving a sound drubbing to all the Lake District's children and joggers. My excellent run in the Marathon (full distance and tough terrain) was rewarded by a kiss from the reigning Miss Cockermouth. Les failed to get a peck from either the beauty queen or my mum who witnessed his epic win!

**Impressive PBs and training John, you would have CLEANED UP both in road and cross country teams in the current era. Why do you think we had such strength in depth particularly in the eighties.**



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Quite simple really. Andy Catton was the major reason that this club excelled. Local athletes and not-so-local athletes were attracted to the club by his performances. Coates, Meadows, Webb, Karl Hick and Adrian Gilham joined from school. Kevin Steere and Kirk Clifford transferred from Cambridge. Andy Etchells, Andy Nicholl, Peer Ingvorsen and I joined after moving to the area for work. Add to this the existing 'ageing' members Tony Nixon, Roy Gill, John Batchelor, Mick Herring, Bill Fothergill and the venerable Gerry Pells alongside wise old counsellors Frank Heaney, Howard Williams, Dave Jones and Alec Tiffin who provided invaluable encouragement and advice.

The social life we created amongst our group (The Joker Crew) reinforced the ties which started in the training and racing sphere, enabling us to attract even more wannabe Cattons - Ernie Forsyth, Les Hislop, Les Roworth, Gary Murdock, Lee Malcolm, the Layzell twins, Glen Piper to name just a few.

We trained and raced for each other as well as against each other. Ordinary runners gradually progressed to being very accomplished athletes with personal bests that would see them right at the front of most of today's races.

**What is your impression of the Club in it's current state and the effect that the ELVIS series of races has had .**

After a period in the doldrums, I really think that the club is starting to punch its weight again. I have been really impressed with our young cross country boys whilst marshalling at races and hope that they continue enjoying individual and team success. The nucleus of the club has changed but the ethos is the same - it's a family club and we enjoy each other's company, encouraging each other rather than clambering over each other to achieve our own goals.

The ELVIS series of races may well have saved the club from sliding into the abyss. With the demise of the track team ten years ago and the dwindling fortunes on the road/country, the



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series enabled a consolidation of our competitive efforts in a social atmosphere (as well as boosting our Hilly 5 which commemorates one of Ilford's loveliest members Newman Sargent).

Add to that the way Wayne Hick and Gary Floate reinvigorated the track and field team and it is starting to feel like we can have another 'golden' period.

### **What is your greatest achievement as a Veteran Over 40 in the running world ?**

Being old means that I can no longer recall any great achievements so I hope that others can (message me !)

Unfortunately, my veteran career was blighted from the start by a recurring back injury. I was even outsprinted in a Met League race at Chigwell by Gerry Pells! My best 10 miler as a vet 40 was 65min 30 at Great Baddow, vet 50 was 67min 50sec in Belfast and vet 60 was 75min 10 sec in Exeter. Hoping to crack 90mins at 70 at this rate of deterioration.

### **Why did you join Ilford AC as opposed to another running club ?**

When I moved to Essex in 1976, I looked in Athletics Weekly for the best club in the area and Woodford Green stood out. I introduced myself and joined a training group headed by Maurice Benn. They obviously were unimpressed and although I guested for them in several cross country races, there was no warmth. I bumped into my old Oxford University mate Andy Etchells in Epsom where I was representing my employers in a cross country race and it was coincidence that Andy had moved in with his brother in Ilford. He suggested we meet up for a run (I got the bus from my bedsit in Wanstead to Ilford Lane) and followed up with an



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invitation to Cricklefields where I was met with a Frank Heaney welcome...and Bob the Groundsman gave me a savaging for not paying my track ticket! The group were really friendly and there was no 'attitude' so I joined shortly afterwards.

**What was your occupation in your heyday of the sport ?**

I joined NatWest Bank as a graduate trainee manager and progressed up the ranks over 28 years until RBS took over and offered me voluntary redundancy which I snapped up.

Then took a part time job later in 2004 with Essex Police Sports Association as their Finance and Administration Officer, which meant I could run for Essex Police.

**Worst Injury ?**

Recurrent achilles tendon trouble in my heyday and back/sciatic problem in my forties.

**Favourite running Shoe ?**

Onitsuka Tiger Marathon (now Asics)

**What school did you go to and did you do Athletics there ?**



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St Pauls Primary School, followed by Stand Grammar School for Boys.

Introduced to athletics, football and cricket at primary school where I was not quick enough for the sprints so was coached in hurdles for the local area schools championship.

Did all sports at grammar school – football cricket basketball and running as well as swimming and water polo for Salford City Swimming Club in my spare time.

As my studies / homework started to increase I needed to focus on one and cross country fitted the bill.

### **Happiest moment in running after your Great North Run Weekends ?**

It has to be my run for Essex Police in the Police Sport UK 10 mile road race in Northern Ireland – it really spurred me on to think I could have a decent veteran career. In one of those massive coincidences, after that morning's race, I bumped into an old Ilford AC mucker, Martin Layzell in WH Smiths in Bangor on Sea High St

### **What is your best ParkRun Time and where ?**

Still haven't troubled the parkrun officials – can't run at that ungodly hour!

### **What has your current training been like in Lockdown ?**



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Probably better than prior to the plague. Longish run with Tim Heaney and Andy Catton at Chigwell on a Saturday, sharp 3 mile road run on Mon/Tues and 5/6 miles steady on a Thursday.

**if you had your running career again would you change anything or do anything different?**

Drink less the night before important races. Do a lot more stretching.

**Fantasy Dinner party. 12 guests.**

3 Runners - Les Hislop, Frank Heaney, Ernie Forsyth

3 From any other sport - Muhammad Ali, Bobby Charlton, Victoria Pendleton

3 Musicians - David Bowie, Annie Lennox, Stevie Wonder

3 Other celebrities - Clint Eastwood, Matt Berry, Ricky Gervais

**Amazing Marathon PB - Can you tell us how you trained for marathons?**





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It was really the same as my normal winter training regime but increasing the long Sunday run – I completed a 30 mile run with Gary Webb because we took a wrong turn in Billericay – and adding a second run of 5 miles on two days of the week to build the mileage to 80/85 miles.

The aim was to dispel the fear of the race's length and to make the race's pace feel comfortably within your range.

**Have you ever had to watch your diet or has running kept you trim?**

I am blessed with a really fast metabolism and so the answer is no. When I had the back injury I went up to 12st 7lb because of lunchtime beers at work! Now tipping the scales at 10st 10lb which is the same as my old racing weight.

**Did you ever get to see George Best play and would he be your favourite Manchester United player?**

Frequently attended the Stretford End Paddock in the glory days and George Best was outstanding but nobody matched Bobby Charlton (Cantona came closest)

**What is your opinion of the new spring loaded trainers that are setting new records.**

**Would you have worn them given the chance in your heyday or would you have been of the opinion that any achievement or PB you achieved was down to your own hard work rather than what you were wearing on your feet?**



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I despise cheating and these kangaroo shoes do seem to be outside the spirit of our sport. I would never use performance enhancing drugs or kit, and prefer to be the best that I can honestly be.

**You mentioned Sumo wrestling as a favourite sport. Which 2 Ilford athletes would you like to see Sumo wrestle each other?**

This could be a bit tricky so I will need to be careful.

Gary Webb in his current body against Gordon Crouch- that would be epic!

**Is most of your training now on or off road? Tony Nixon once put his longevity in running down to racing/training mainly off road. Would you agree with the sentiment?**

Tony Nixon is spot on - the road shock really does have a cumulative effect over the years. I prefer a nice golf course or country park these days. I would recommend to the younger athletes to stay off road as often as feasible.

**Have you ever owned a watch that measures your pace and distance? Do you think modern smart running watches would have improved you in your heyday or is there no substitute for hard work?**

I have a Garmin and always disagree with how far I have gone. As my aged eyes don't work



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too well anymore I can't read the watch in running so I still rely on working as hard as possible for as long as possible.

*PS Thank you for all the questions - it has been a walk down memory lane for me and thanks to Billy for putting this initiative together alongside all the other excellent communication work he produces.*

*Question : While working with the Essex Police were you ever "leaned on" to turn out for their race walking team. If so, how did you get on?*

Haha - yes indeed I was volunteered to represent Essex Police in the annual Police Sport UK 10 kilometre walking championship in Birmingham in 2007.

What makes it even more ridiculous is that the race incorporated the annual challenge match of British Police vs Civil Service, so I wore the vest of British Police!!!

It was a baptism of fire and the speed with which the rest of the field accelerated away from myself and my Essex colleague (an orienteer also shoehorned into the team) was alarming.

Needless to say, I was last as the orienteer even did me for technique and speed in the last 50 metres - finished in 70 minutes (as did my walking career).

Or so I thought!!!

I was shamed into racing the 2km walk in the Essex Police Athletics Championships alongside the 800m, 1500m, 5000m and 3000m steeplechase -all on the same afternoon - crippling mainly due to the silly walk.