

GOYT VALLEY STRIDERS

**NEWSLETTER
December 2007**

INTRODUCTION

As promised in the last newsletter I have managed to assemble a bumper Christmas edition. Thank you to all the articles that you have submitted, they are a real treat.

On a personal front I have just got back from running the Benidorm Half Marathon. I went off for the weekend with Kevin Day and Steve Hennessey who ran the full marathon. It was my first half for 4 years and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Watch out for information in a future email about a possible club trip to run the event in 2008.

A few weeks ago we held Terry's race. Despite the weather, which saw a few inches of snow on the tops, the attendance was excellent and 18 runners took part. The overall winner was Karl Smith.

As usual there are a number of important messages in the newsletter, such as the dates for the Xmas Drinks Bash and the AGM and Prize Giving. The devil really is in the detail, so make sure you read you newsletter thoroughly!

Oh, and one last thing. There is still time to buy that last minute Xmas present from the GVS shop. The new vests and t-shirts that I have would look perfect on any Strider; I'm open for late night shopping most nights!

I hope you enjoy the newsletter and a Happy Christmas and New Year to all.

Mark

LONDON MARATHON

This year the club has received two guaranteed entries to the London Marathon. As usual the priority is given to those members who have applied for a place through the ballot, but been rejected. If, the places are not taken by members fulfilling this criteria then they are up for grabs by anyone.

Please let me know ASAP if you wish to be considered for a London Marathon place. If more than two people come forward in either category then a draw will take place at the Xmas Drinks Bash on December 14th.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The subscription for next year will soon be due. I am happy to start taking payments from now. Individual membership remains the same next year at £10.00. Family membership as gone up to £20.00; this small rise is essential to cover the cost of affiliating to England Athletics.

For those people who have debts outstanding from this year, please can you try and let me have the outstanding money before the 31st December 2007, so that we can balance the accounts. There's not many of you, but please make the effort.

XMAS DRINKS

The Xmas drinks bash will take place at the Navigation Inn, Buxworth on Friday 14th December 2007 from 8:00pm. It's an opportunity to share all those stories from over the past 12 months!

Ridgeway Challenge 2007

85 miles, 9000 feet ascent

When I booked the flight earlier in the year, many months before the Ridgeway race, the plan seemed simple enough: I'd do the race, and then rejoin the family in France and recover on the final week of their holiday on the beach. The race would start at 12 noon, the plane would take off 24 hours later; in between I would run 85 miles from Ivinghoe Beacon to Avebury in about 16 hours, and then drive 2 hours to the airport. However, as I lay shivering in the marshall's tent, utterly spent, 2 hours behind schedule, and with the final 16 miles to do, I reflected that it perhaps was a little harder than I'd first thought.

As far as progress can be measured I'd reached the halfway stage exactly to plan. I'd kept to a steady slow pace from the start, letting the leaders sprint off into the distance, and then steadily reel them in over the next few hours. It's not quite running, more like a shuffle, but after 4 hours I was overtaking most of the walkers who'd started 2 hours earlier, and soon the guy I'd been running with slowed to a walk and fell behind. At 30 miles I reached the 4th checkpoint – on this cloudless and hot August day we had to rely for drinks mainly on the 9 checkpoints, though local knowledge helped steer me towards the few taps (there are no streams to drink from along the Ridgeway) – and they offered me tea. Worth the minute or two to wait for the brew I reckoned, though much later on in the race tea would become my lifesaver. Following this the warning signs got clearer in the final 3 miles before halfway; I was feeling too hot, and breathing was too fast for the pace I was going. But I'd kept on going, driven by the calculation of the pace I needed to maintain to reach the finish in time.

The enforced rest had an incredible and almost immediate effect on my performance - I soon got back up to speed, and ran the last two sections at my planned race pace.

The clear night and full moon of the early evening was by now replaced by dense mist rising from the valleys, and soon I entered a long section of extremely low visibility. Unable to pick out any features (even Swindon's golden neon glow), I tracked the faint path across fields almost by instinct remembering the route from the night recce I'd run a month earlier on this section.

Approaching the final checkpoint I noticed a headtorch about a mile behind me, so I pushed on quickly determined not to lose my fourth place. With only 5 miles left now it was easier to maintain the effort to press on. In the billowing dawn mist I never saw the following headtorch again, and I felt lonely approaching a dark and silent Avebury. Running the last few miles brought on feelings of immense satisfaction that you can really only experience after running through the night. Rounding the corner to the finish I was relieved to see the small organisers' group and I crossed the line in the grey dawn at 5.29am. To my surprise they gave me the 3rd place medal asking if I'd just overtaken the runner who'd been 3rd at the final checkpoint. I hadn't. He finally appeared about 12 minutes after me having taken a wrong turn and over 5 hours to do the last two legs compared to my 3:08.

For me the highlight of this race was the huge benefit that the unplanned hour's rest gave me - "no-one's ever failed to get round anything by drinking too much tea" as Julian wrote on the Message Board. The effect was that I'd found hidden reserves so that I covered the final 16 miles over 20 minutes faster than the winner. Of the 55 starters, only 40 completed, and I was in the plane, and on my holidays, before the 26th had finished.

GVS CHRISTMAS QUIZ

Its that time of year, now there is a chill in the air and the festive spirit is breaking out everywhere. So to show a great tribute to this time of year, I have painstakingly created this fun quiz for all to try. So put on your Santa hats and have a bash at the easiest quiz on the planet.

Which Fell Race

- 1- I start at a bridge and on my journey I pass through Erwood Hall, I have a total ascent of 1400 feet and I finish at a different place from where I started.
- 2- One shows you the way in the dark and one is a fish- which fell race am I?
- 3- Which discontinued race series included 'The Vanessa Chappel', 'Boars Head' and 'Kettlehulme' fell races?
- 4- Which fell race and tough half marathon starts at the famous plague village?
- 5- Which fell race gives all finishers a trout?

Club Questions

- 6- Name the four GVS Posties. (point for each one)
- 7- What was Kevin Days fancy dress at this years London Marathon and what did he grow especially for the occasion? (Bonus point for both)
- 8- What three races do the GVS organise each year?
- 9- What are the names of the two new, little GVS introduced to the club by Alistair and Shaun late this year?
- 10- Which strider is on course to complete their 100th marathon? (And he knows all his times from all of them, by memory!)

Christmas Questions

- 11-Who was Scrooges ex-business partner?
- 12-How many 'Lords are leaping' in the carol 'Twelve Days Of Christmas' ?
- 13-Which famous British actor starred alongside the Muppets in 'A Muppets Christmas Carol'?
- 14-Which Pagan festival falls on the 21st December, and what is unusual about this day? (Bonus point for both)
- 15-What are the three gifts bought to Jesus by the three wise men?

Know your Christmas Tunes

Who are the artist and what are the songs. You get a point for each. (Ive done this from memory so they may not be dead exact).

- 16-'Last Christmas I gave you my heart, the very next day you gave it away'.
- 17-'Its Chrissstmass'.
- 18-'Snow is falling all around you, children playing, having fun'.
- 19-'Wish I was home for Christmas'.
- 20-'Its Christmas time and everyone is having fun'.

Big bonus question

- 21-What as Shauny Sheep got on top of his Christmas tree this year? (it isn't a sheep).

All this is just for fun, but if you want a really cool prize, then write your answers down and give them to me at the GVS Christmas do and I will mark them and draw a winning entry. The winner will receive a prize- honest.

Pennine Challenge

Turning up for race registration on the Friday I set about trying to find out who were the other nine entrants into the duathlon. The duathlon is held in tandem with the Pennine 100 mile footrace and most of the extremely gaunt looking people milling around were competitors in the latter. Worrying, all looked horrified when I asked if they were duathletes. It's scary when someone who is willing to cover 100 miles on foot questions your sanity. Eventually duathletes started to appear and most seemed to have a pretty good pedigree in extreme endurance events, mountain biking, fell running or all three. Regardless of background everyone felt that the first run and one bike loop was within the realms of possibility but beyond that was into the unknown.

After a broken nights sleep I woke to the sound of driving rain. Everyone seemed apprehensive and final preparations were carried out either in silence or with odd dashes of gallows humour. Thankfully the rain eased and the sun made a token appearance for the 0800 start. The start of Ultra races are always a bit strange as nobody wants to appear to go off too hard resulting in a stumbling hiatus across the line. Everybody settled into an "Ultra Shuffle" (similar to Ironman Shuffle but even slower). Leaving Glossop the field soon strung out as everyone found their own pace. I found myself running with two other competitors in the duathlon Nick Doran and Matt Longden. We agreed to stick together and work as a team. Aside from having some company I was pleased to have someone to check navigation with and the guys were also familiar with the bike route.

The first 13 miles of the route were relatively flat and we reached Checkpoint 1 at the village of Diggle feeling comfortable and enjoying the day.

Straight out of Diggle the hills kept on rearing up with alarming regularity as we headed for the M62. A map-reading error on my part added an extra kilometre to our route, most of it uphill. I was livid and silently chastised myself for the next couple of miles. Passing under the motorway we knew we only had about three miles left to Checkpoint 2 and transition onto the bikes. Unfortunately, as often happens when you get near the end of a leg, we lost our focus and started to lose time. Silly things like stopping to go to the loo or making adjustments to kit increase in frequency. All things that could be done at the upcoming checkpoint now eat up valuable minutes. Prior to my navigation error and our dawdling we'd been hoping to leave transition by 1500 including a 20-30 min break to get some food in, treat blisters and sort the bikes out. Now we'd be lucky to get riding by 1530. We'd now have less than 8 hours to get the first bike lap done before nightfall. Maybe we should have pushed a bit harder on the run but at least we all felt fresh. Reaching transition we were pleased to see seven bikes remaining meaning there were only three riders ahead of us. The front runners were flying with Chris Edgely and Carl Silver working together in 2nd and 3rd and Andrew Boyd out on his own almost two hours ahead of us. Two competitors had already dropped out reducing the duathlon field to eight. Sorting ourselves out Nick removed his running shoes to reveal some horrendous blisters. Both Matt and I winced in sympathy as he painfully forced his feet into his cycling shoes. We all knew he was going to be in for a tough time as we'd be off the bikes pushing for some long stretches.

When Nick and Matt had ridden the loop in training it had taken them about 7.5 hours so we'd be really pushed to finish the first loop in daylight as planned. For now though the technical descent into Walsden put massive grins onto all of our faces. This was scrubbed off though as we hit the packhorse trail and the path turned steeply uphill. Off the bikes and pushing, our stiff soled bike shoes skittered on the slippery slabs making progress painfully slow. I could now see how 47 miles could take so long and suddenly the enormity of the task became very real. As we climbed we overtook Steve Bentley and David Sales and eventually the gradient eased allowing us to remount. Descending the slabs I was really glad of having full suspension and pitied anyone on a hardtail. Riding as a team was a real advantage as we were able to remind one another to keep fuelling and to pace each other on the draining climbs. After about two hours we reached Checkpoint 3 at Jack's Bridge and were happy with our progress having pulled back a bit of time on the leading riders. With the weather holding I was really enjoying the ride and started to feel confident about a second lap. We were treated to some fantastic downhill and stunning views. The next section to Checkpoint 4 at Holme Chapel flew by and we were steadily reeling the leaders in.

The climb out of Holme Chapel was an absolute horror. Nick was really suffering with his feet. Our pace slowed to a crawl and once again focus was lost and time wasted. We stopped once to dress Nick's feet and twice to change our layers. Clouds were building ominously in the distance and dusk seemed to be arriving ahead of schedule. Adding to our miseries the eight miles stretch ahead contained over forty gates.

Even though we had a good system of leapfrogging each other our average pace plummeted. Every time we dismounted we let out a harmonised geriatric moan giving not only tell-tell sign of our state of fatigue but also some welcome light relief. Another massive climb to the top of the Leach followed. Drops of rain started to fall and the long jarring cobbled descent rather than providing respite chilled and battered our tired bodies. For the last couple of hours the temperature had been rapidly dropping and now, with the increasing persistent drizzle, keeping warm was impossible. However, reaching Checkpoint 5 at Broadley raised our spirits. Although we'd be going for fourteen hours and the last section had tested our resolve my legs still felt strong. Nick's feet were no longer bothering him and Matt was riding brilliantly. If the weather improved and we could get some warm dry kit on at the next checkpoint the second lap was still on.

Leaving the checkpoint my Exposure lights pierced the gloom and I started to relish the thrill of a night ride. Any thoughts though of an enjoyable night were instantly quashed as the heavens opened in a remorseless downpour. We climbed into low cloud reducing both visibility and my body temperature. As I became more anxious I tensed up and my bike slivered uncontrollably beneath me. Our team morale crashed and the normally laid back Nick lost his temper with Matt for pushing ahead. We all regressed into our own silent floodlit bubbles, concentrating intently on staying upright and on the grim job in hand. My internal dialogue raged. One voice told me I was going to reach the halfway point and although cold had the strength in my legs to carry on. The other nagged about the prospect of another four or five hours in the cold and dark covering terrain that'd been marginally possible to ride in the dry. The rain was increasing in intensity and, after several consecutive near spills, I was almost ready to quit.

Only letting Nick and Matt down prevented reaching a final decision. I was still concerned about Nick's feet and he didn't seem happy. My gut feeling was that he'd quit too. That would leave Matt who was looking super strong to plough on alone. I decided I'd keep my mouth shut when we reached the checkpoint and, if Nick quit, bite the bullet and keep going. If he kept going I'd quietly bow out.

Reaching Checkpoint 6 at Summit we discovered the weather had already taken its toll. Steve and David had quit at Checkpoint 5 in Broadley. Up ahead Carl and Chris were still grinding on but their pace had slowed to a crawl. Race leader Andrew had got into a car at the Holme Chapel Checkpoint 8 and was unsure whether to continue. With this news Nick was suddenly filled with enthusiasm and insisted that we at least push on for one more checkpoint and see how it went. For me though that was the end. I'd already talked myself out of it and, with regret, told the guys I wouldn't be joining them. With a handshake and best wishes I saw them off into the storm. Sitting in the back of the van I felt dejected and ashamed of myself. As the noise of the rain increased though, I thought of the first treacherous descent and the horrendous rock slabs and reasoned I'd made a sensible decision. I'd still managed to cover 28 miles on foot, 47 miles of arduous mountain biking and physically at least felt strong. Drifting off to sleep I was content with my performance and knew I'd be back next year.

The weather did not let up. Nick and Matt made it to Checkpoint 7 at Jack's Bridge and quit due to Matt's lights being waterlogged. Chris Edgely also made it to Jack's Bridge but thought the conditions too dangerous to continue. Carl Silver made it alone to Checkpoint 8 but was eventually worn down by the elements. Andrew Boyd was at the point of quitting and was unable to warm-up even sat in a car with the engine running.

Finding out he'd have to wait for at least 4 hours to be transported back to base, with the rain easing and the sun rising he got back on his bike. In a truly heroic effort he not only finished the second bike loop but also managed the second run and, in a time of 32 hours, became the first person to complete the race.

Without a doubt the Pennine Challenge Duathlon is one of the toughest multi-sport races in the world. I'm sure now it has been shown to be possible it will attract more competitors and grow to become an established classic in the ultra-endurance calendar. Next years race has been pencilled in for June 21st/22nd and entry details can be found at www.ambitionevents.com/penninechallenge/

Nik Cook

BOG SNORKELLING!

The Course

The race begins with a challenging 7.5 mile (1000ft ascent) multi terrain run taking competitors away from the Waen Rhydd Bogs, into the town of Llanwrtyd Wells and over surrounding hills. Conditions underfoot are varied including road, marsh and rock. A good pair of fell/trail shoes are a must. The Bog Snorkel takes place in two 60 yard trenches with a short stagger in between. The bike leg is a demanding 19 miles (2000ft ascent) including long fire-road climbs and technical rocky descents. Good off-road bike handling skills will save a lot of energy and make up a lot of time.

The Race

Llanwrtyd Wells has the distinction of being the smallest town in Great Britain with a population in 2001 of only 604. It is picture postcard beautiful nestled in the heart of Mid-Wales. However, what it lacks in size it makes up for in bizarre events organised by the local company Green Events. The Man vs Horse pits two legs against four in order to settle an argument hatched in a local pub that over rough ground a runner can beat a rider. The Real Ale wobble is a 35-mile mountain bike ride providing beer at each checkpoint. Most infamous is the Bog Snorkelling World Championships. Held on the August Bank Holiday weekend each year at the Waen Rhydd Peat Bog competitors, equipped with snorkel and flippers, must negotiate two lengths of the bog (120 yards), without the aid of conventional swimming strokes. Not insane enough though, the Bog Snorkelling has spawned Mountain Bike Bog Snorkelling using lead filled frames and concrete filled tyres to travel along the bottom of the bog. Then, three years ago, the diabolical concept of a Bog Snorkelling Triathlon was conceived.

Using a run, Bog Snorkel and mountain bike format the race is without a doubt the most novel event in the triathlon race calendar. Its appeal for me was that I'm one of the many triathletes for whom the swim leg is a matter of survival rather than racing. A 120-yard "swim" with the assistance of flippers sounded great to me, even if it was in a peat bog. Also, I'm primarily a mountain biker and fell runner so a hilly off-road race was a must do and I'm a sucker for a bit of mud.

Arriving the afternoon before the race I made the mistake of going down to take a look at the bog. Suddenly 120 yards looked a long way when it consisted of a stinking fetid trench. Vivid anxiety dreams of being sucked helplessly into the bowels of the swamp haunted my night. I kept on reassuring myself that I'd only be in the bog for a few minutes and, as long as I kept my mouth shut, I'd be fine. At registration fellow competitors milled around puzzling over how to fit their mask, snorkel and flippers in a transition box. "Stroke" choice dominated conversation but it all remained strictly theoretical, as strangely nobody seemed willing to have a practise snorkel. A large contingent from Bristol and District Tri Club including members of a Stag party were planning to race. Although the Stag, fetching as he was in his nightdress and polka dot swimsuit, looked a little jaded and apprehensive about the pending exertions. After a brief and to the point race briefing "you'll be running up that hill, snorkelling in that bog and then cycling up that hill" we made our way over to the start line.

After two weeks of almost non-stop rain the sudden appearance of the sun made the field strangely cautious at the start of the run and the early pace seemed very sensible. Turning onto a boggy field I found myself in 4th place and, as I picked my way through the sedges, felt strong. Heading out onto a road section I glanced back to see I was a fair distance ahead of the next runner. Looking forwards the runner in 3rd place was about 100 yards up the road and I felt confident that once the climb started I'd reel him in. Entering Llanwrtyd Wells the course turned sharply left and the long climb up the extinct volcano Garn Ddwad began. Having moved to the Peak District in January I now looked forward to hills and settled into my steady fell runners climbing gait. Like down shifting on a bike my stride shortened and cadence increased allowing me to maintain my effort just below my redline. After a mile and a half the road ended and we turned onto a steeper rocky bridleway. By now I'd almost taken 3rd place and, nearing the crest of the climb, pushed on a bit harder and overtook. It'd been an absolute brute of a climb but I was pleased with how I'd run it. Ahead the two leaders were still in sight about 150 yards away and I reckoned by taking some risk on the descent I might be able to catch them. The broken rocks underfoot threatened a turned ankle with every footfall but, as the trail twisted through the forest, I knew I had to keep pushing the pace. Crossing a small stream the trail turned abruptly towards home. After a final tricky narrow section it opened up into a broad forest track. Catching a glimpse ahead I was surprised, and a bit disappointed, to see I'd made no significant in roads on the leaders but hoped I'd managed to distance the guys behind me. Still feeling good I kept the pace steady reminding myself that I still had a Bog Snorkel and 19 miles of mountain biking to come.

Reaching the main road into Llanwrtyd Wells I suddenly heard footsteps behind. Slowing at the water station I was shocked, as the runner I'd overtaken to take 3rd had caught me. Alongside him was the clear leader in the senior's category having run a shorter 6-mile course. Not panicking I tagged along with them and climbing out of the town managed to once again distance 4th place a bit. Crossing the boggy ground towards transition the route markings suddenly became a bit unclear. The three of us found ourselves having to leap several fences and having an early dip in a chest deep stream. Eventually finding our way back on the correct route we entered transition as a group with all five of us scrabbling for our Bog Snorkelling kit together.

Unprecedented good manners in a race situation suddenly came to the fore, as nobody seemed keen to take the plunge into the bog first. Hesitantly we slid into the quagmire trying to ignore the stench that was somehow penetrating our masks. Thoughts of what might be lurking in the slime and weed below us were put to the back of our minds. Progress was abruptly halted as the temperature of the bog made putting your head under a real shock. After a few false starts I set off hot on the flippers of the man ahead. Unsurprisingly visibility was zero. I didn't think I'd ever swim in water murkier than the docks at Excel in the London Tri but, compared to this, they resemble a crystal clear spring. It was only when I felt a wallop on my head that I realised I'd swum straight into the flippers of the guy I was following. Moving to one side I sprinted to overtake and hoped I hadn't caused too much disruption in doing so. With open water ahead now I found the most effective means of propulsion to be with arms straight out ahead and a butterfly leg kick. Although this seemed to be working well to me, my Wife later informed me I resembled a "fitting dolphin".

Reaching the end of the first 60-yard length the next obstacle to overcome was to scabble out of the first trench in order to cross into second return trench. We'd been advised in the race briefing that removal of flippers was a good idea and now, faced with a slippery almost vertical bank, I could see why. With my flippers in one hand I lunged at several clumps of sedge in an attempt to gain some purchase but they just ripped out consigning me back to the trench. Was my nightmare coming true? Three of us were all bunched together now trying to escape the trench floundering ineptly like inebriated seals. Eventually we found a breach in the rampart and flopped together into the second trench. Chaos ensued as, sat in waist deep filth, we all struggled to get our flippers back on. Disaster struck as I lost my right flipper but, in a spirit of shared suffering and camaraderie, my fellow bog snorkellers aided me in the hunt. After a few false alarms, with flippers being "found" that were attached to feet, mine was lifted with a satisfying squelch from the swamp. We completed the second length in orderly convoy with an unspoken truce that we'd survive this together and resume racing hostilities once on the bikes. Thankfully exiting the second trench proved much easier and, with flippers and mask in hand, we made our way as a four to transition.

In one of the slowest transitions of my triathlon career (I think I was still in shock from the bog) I finally headed off in 3rd place giving a couple of minute to the race leader but with 2nd in view 100 yards ahead. The 4th place rider was close behind though and I resolved to push hard on the climb out of transition to try and distance him. The first kilometre consisted of boggy fields and more sedges making for very heavy going. Finally conditions under tyre soon improved and I settled into a long fire road climb.

I seemed to be making up some distance on second place but was concerned as to the pace the leader must be setting. Aside from a very quick bog to bike transition he was also riding a cyclocross rather than a mountain bike. Fire road climbs like this would be perfect for him and I just hoped the technical downhill sections would allow me to claw back some time. Passing the marshal marking the start of the loop we were to ride twice the trail kept on climbing. Although feeling strong and making up distance on 2nd place I desperately needed some fast rough stuff to have any hope of winning. Eventually the climb ended and the surface became more broken. Massive puddles covered the trail frustratingly slowing progress, as there was no indication as to how deep they were or what obstructions lurked beneath them. Several easily covered my chain-rings but the trail below seemed clear and by remembering my line knew I could attack them on the second lap. Approaching a particularly large and menacing puddle I was shocked to see the 2nd placed rider sat in the water, off his bike and obviously in some discomfort. I quickly found the reason for his misfortune as the puddle suddenly deepened almost unseating me too. Stopping I asked if he was ok. He grimaced yes but a sudden attack of cramp was making it hard for him to get up. I offered assistance but he waved me on my way and, feeling bad to have overtaken him in this way, I pushed on hard. A rocky descent followed and, knowing it was my only hope to catch the leader, I pushed my bike and skills to the limit. Spending more time in the air than on the ground the adrenaline surged through me. I knew I was taking big risks but I was having too much fun to care. The technical section ended far too quickly and I was faced by another fire-road climb.

Tapping out a good tempo on the ascent I was rewarded by a sustained technical descent. Exposed bedrock and drop-offs came in rapid-fire succession. I was immensely grateful of my 5" travel and knew I be gaining some time. Reaching the bottom and the start of the second lap I was invigorated by the descent and felt super strong. Knowing the course now I could abandon caution, attack the climbs and give everything to try and catch the man ahead.

Consciously pushing bigger gears than on the opening lap I really buried myself on the first climb. Passing riders on their first lap all I could manage was a grunt of encouragement as I used passing them as a focus for my efforts. A cool breeze signified the top of the climb and this time the puddles held no fear as I ploughed through them at full tilt. I took even crazier risks on the descent and, as my brakes screamed, prayed my bike would withstand the punishment. More pain on the second long climb was compensated by the rush of the final descent and, at every turn, I expected to catch a glimpse of the race leader. I was certain I must be gaining on him but he remained elusively out of sight. Reaching the end of the second lap I threw all I had into a fire-road descent and road section pushing top gear even though my legs were on fire. Turning off the road to drop through the fields down to the finish there was still no sign of him and I resigned myself to 2nd place. After a final tricky section through some gorse and a leg sapping boggy finishing straight I rolled exhausted but happy across the line in a time just over 2.5 hours. I shook hands with the winner and congratulated him on his win. He'd come in just over a minute ahead of me and was eight minutes inside of the course record.

Experiences of the English Fellrunning Championship

Well, this year I hit a milestone in age and decided to have a go at the English Fellrunning Championship. The way it works is that six existing races are nominated for the championship – two short, two medium and two long, and those who qualify (look at the Fell Calendar for the rules) get points according to their position amongst their age group and those older. Now I was never going to feature in the open championship, but my objective was to score V50 points in each race I entered. Your best short, medium and long races plus one other count towards your overall championship points.

The races this year were:

Edale Skyline (L) 21miles/4500ft climb
Paddy's Pole (S) 4.2miles/1126ft
Fairfield Horseshoe (M) 10.1miles/3207ft
Duddon Valley (L) 20miles/6000ft
Weasdale Horseshoe (M) 8.1miles/1800ft
Great Whernside (S) 4miles/1468ft

So, the championship year started with the Skyline, and many of you will know that it was an epic with high winds and sleet and snow showers. There was a very high rate of attrition and several cases of hypothermia, so it was a real achievement to finish at all. I was very satisfied with the 9 points I gained for being 22nd male runner over 50. I'll be back next year to better my time.



The climb up to Mam Tor on the Edale Skyline 2007

The next race was Paddy's Pole near Chipping in the Forest of Bowland. This was a short race that started up a narrow road which even though men and women run separately in the short races, was very congested. I was too gentlemanly and lost out at the beginning, although I made up some places later on. In the end I was relieved to get five points for 26th over 50.

I loved running the Fairfield Horseshoe near Ambleside. There was torrential rain until a couple of minutes before we started, then the skies started to clear so that by the time we got onto the hill the visibility was incredibly good with wide views across the Lake District. There is a steep climb to start with, then it levels off a bit to a steady climb up to the summit of Fairfield, drops gently then a steeper descent before joining a track for the run in to the finish.

For me the most enjoyable part was the steep descent – I was grinning all the way down, and most of the way back home too! I only managed to get one point having dropped a few places on the track at the end, but that didn't lessen the pleasure.



I missed Duddon Valley as it clashed with our spring break, so my next championship race was the Weasdale Horseshoe in eastern Cumbria. It was very wet for this race, shortish (8.1 miles), but mostly very runnable so quite a tough one. I felt I had a good run and was very pleased with my 13 points.

The last race was Great Whernside from Kettlewell in the Yorkshire Dales. This is short, tough race with nearly 1500ft of climb in a four mile race. It was a slog up the hill, and a very fast descent. There was a smaller entry for this, which helped me to my best result of the year – 14 points.

So I achieved the objective I had set myself, and finished up with 41 points in 25th place. The V50 winner was Mike Egner of Dark Peak who scored the maximum of 128 points (32 points each for four first places).

The open championship came down to the last race and was won by Simon Bailey with two firsts and two seconds.

Halfway offered me a 30 minute rest for a hot meal and drinks in Goring village hall. Here it had taken me a long time to cool down, and get my breathing back to normal. In hindsight, I should have stayed longer here, and eaten and drunk more, but I was keen to crack on to keep my 4th place, felt I'd had sufficient rest, and I was looking forward to the cooler night section ahead.

The first few hours from Goring were pleasant enough - much cooler after 8pm when the sun went down, but I found I was walking more than I'd expected. By midnight I was walking a lot more, and wandering across the path, unable to keep in a straight line. Knowing that it was about 2 miles away, it was then I made the deal with myself to keep going till the next checkpoint and spend some minutes there recovering before the sixteen miles of the final two legs. I walked into Checkpoint Seven in pretty bad shape - my stomach was in knots, and legs were too painful to run downhill or quickly on the flat. The marshals asked me what I wanted, but I couldn't string many words together, and I overheard one say "poor guy, he doesn't know what he wants". I was obviously not well. I had thought just a dose of Dioralyte would help, but after starting to shiver uncontrollably I had to lie down for 30 minutes in the marshall's tent covered in woollen blankets. It was bad enough to make me think of pulling out of the race there, but I rewarmed in the tent, then had more tea, jam sandwiches and another 30 mins rest by the marshall's blazing log campfire (manned by a friendly group from Swindon Striders). My brain was barely functioning as I struggled with coherent conversation and simple mental arithmetic about the remaining distance, but after an hour's rest I still had my original plan intact – to get up and go! And so I set off (still in 4th place) for the final 16 miles.

It was a very satisfying series to take part in. Because of the distances involved in getting to these races, there tends to be a bit more hanging around, but the camaraderie is excellent, with opportunities to banter with some of the nutters on the Fellrunner's Forum. Obviously the field in these races is more competitive than the local races so I've had to get used to finishing further down the field, but that has been good for me in some ways, and made me work harder.

Will I do it again next year? Maybe, but because of holidays, I will only be able to run four races. At least I managed to get an entry for the Three Peaks in the mad scramble for places! So come on fellow GVS runners, let's see some of you taking part in championship races in 2008. Details are in the forthcoming Fell Calendar, but watch out because most of the championship races will be pre-entry.

Even if you don't run any championship races, I would thoroughly recommend having a go at one Lake District race at least next year— what about an away day to one?

Andy Butler

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