



## OMM 2008 - A half marathon to remember!

**Yiannis Tridimas**

Having done many Mountain Marathons, I was sure that the wettest and possibly the hardest one until this year was the KIMM in the Howgills. Then I did the Highlander in Torricon, which was pronounced as the hardest MM thus far. I would agree with this, it was a tough event in a wild area with rough terrain and plenty of snow on both days.

Then came the OMM on 25/25th October in Borrowdale. The weather forecast for the first day was bleak but the day started relatively normal, windy but dry. Ray, my regular MM partner and I were doing the Long Score class. We set off hoping to contest the vets handicap. The first hour was not too bad but as we got high the wind picked up. While contouring round Allen Craggs to our third control the rain driven horizontally by a vicious south-westerly was hitting our face hard. It was by now very wet and felt cold. We paused briefly to reschedule our intended route to take into account the worsening weather. A few minutes stop was enough to make us feel very uncomfortable. Ray was shaking with cold so we set off up the slope to warm up. On the way to our next control while crossing high ground past Esk Pike we had to hold on to the rocks to stop ourselves being blown over. Visibility was very limited and my reading glasses were almost completely opaque.

Unsure about finding the next control and struggling on very exposed ground we decided to abort. We turned our back to the wind and headed for more sheltered ground in the cove north of Ill Crag and Broad Crag. From there we took the Corridor route for a while and began dropping down in the direction of Wasdale Head, intending to make our way to Buttermere via Black Sail Pass, picking up some high scoring points en route. We had already wasted some time running away from the weather and urgency was setting in.

The swirling wind coming up the valley was laden with spray and the waterfalls in the numerous torrents were literally flowing upwards. Unknown to us at first, we were descending into a trap. We could not cross the stream on our right either on our own or linking hands with others. We carried on down hoping to find a wide section where we might be able to wade through and soon found ourselves moving towards the confluence of two uncrossable streams. There were lots of people around, moving in all directions but nobody was getting through the streams.

We had no more time to waste and decided to take the quickest route to the overnight camp, hoping not to lose whatever score we had accumulated. We turned uphill towards Styhead and Windy

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2008 WFRA Prizewinners pictured after the Rhobell race. Overall Male winner Richard Roberts did receive his award but had to leave immediately after winning the Rhobell to be present at a friends wedding

### OPEN WELSH CHAMPIONSHIPS 2009

The following races are to be included in the Championships.

Sun 12th April Mynydd Troed (M)  
Sun 17th May Sarn Helen (L)  
Sat 4th July Rhinog H. (L)  
Sat 1st August Y Garn (S)  
Sun 4th Oct. Arenig Fawr (M)  
Sat 28th Nov. Blorengae (S)

A competitor's best results from up to 4 of the 6 races will be counted in the Championship. If 4 races are used this must include one race at each distance.

Every finisher will score points.

### NORTH WALES SERIES 2009

The following races are to be included in the Series.

Saturday 24th January  
**TARREN HENDRE**  
Saturday 7th March  
**PIPE DREAM**  
Saturday 28th March  
**LLANGYNHAFAL LOOP**  
Saturday 9th May  
**FOEL FRAS**  
Saturday 6th June  
**STRETTON HILLS**  
Saturday 4th July  
**RHINOG HORSESHOE**  
Saturday 1st August  
**Y GARN**  
Saturday 5th September  
**HALF PERIS**  
Sunday 4th October  
**ARENIG FAWR**

A competitor's best results from up to 6 of the 9 races will be counted in the Series.

Every finisher will score points. Scores are based on the competitor's time behind the average of the first five finishers. Your score will then be taken away from 100 to make a positive score. If you do not compete in a race you will score zero.

Scores are based on the competitor's time behind the average of the first five finishers. Your score will then be taken away from 100 to make a positive score. If you do not compete in a race you will score zero.

This is an Open Championship. You do not have to have membership of any particular organization or have Welsh qualification to participate. There will be awards for at least the winner in each category and the first Welsh qualifying finisher (if different). The North and South Wales Series are also open races, open to all runners.

### SOUTH WALES SERIES 2009

The following races are to be included in the Series.

Sunday 12th April  
**MYNYDD TROED**  
Saturday 16th May  
**CRIBYNN**  
Saturday 6th June  
**STRETTON HILLS**  
Sunday 28th June  
**COITY**  
Saturday 1st August  
**LLANTHONY**  
Saturday 29th August  
**BECA**  
Saturday 19th September  
**LLYN Y FAN**

A competitor's best results from up to 4 of the 7 races will be counted in the Series.

Every finisher will score points. Scores are based on the competitor's time behind the average of the first five finishers. Your score will then be taken away from 100 to make a positive score. If you do not compete in a race you will score zero.

Cymdeithas  
Rhedyr  
Mynydd  
Cymru



Welsh  
Fell  
Runners  
Association

### Have you paid your 2009 subs?

If you have paid your 2009 subs you should receive next years calendar by mid December.

If you have not yet renewed please download form from our website and send to membership secretary Geoff Clegg,

19 Deganwy Road,  
Deganwy LL31 9DL.

Please include sae (Size C5 162x229mm) basic postage 1st or 2nd class applies.

*If you are not on the Internet a form will be included with this newsletter*

**2009 Calendar  
will be available  
mid December**

Calendr  
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**2009**  
£2.50

Race  
Calendar

# *Blisters and Bonking . . . in the Black Mountains*

Llanbedr, September 2008.  
18m 5,200ft

Despite a last minute flurry of rumours on the FRA Forum, this much-loved autumnal thrash around eastern scarps of the South Wales Massif took place in the usual clockwise direction. For lovers of 'traditional' fell racing, this event has it all – a friendly village school for race HQ, a small but keen field, a characterful organiser and a staunch refusal to use such new fangled things as computers. The results arrive by post, lovingly scripted in longhand and full of information and typical 'Puffing Billy' snippets of information. This year we learnt that he had boiler trouble!

But to the race. Ah yes. Were we to be drowned or would the weather gods take pity on us? Well, pity arrived in the form of a glorious Indian summer day with visibility measurable in tens of miles. Fantastic! From the start, it was clear this was likely to be a 2 horse race as old man Mark Palmer and young buck Rob Gordon chewed up the steep flanks of Pen Cerrig Calch. The gradient rapidly strung out the rest of the field into also-rans. It was a quite perfect day for racing. Clear and breeze free but the warmth took some by surprise. The long pull along the ridge to Pen Allt Mawr

provided stunning views west to the Brecon Beacons and a continual reminder of the climbs to come, with most of the circular course on view I kept my eyes out for red kite but didn't see one. Did anyone else?

The first real navigational challenge at Pen Twyn Glas threw up some interesting route interpretations with several runners going past the tump, committing themselves to a really crashing descent to the valley below. I was chuffed 'cos I found the mythical 'green lane' that cuts obliquely down the mountain flank, saving precious quads from unnecessary trashing. One of the consequences of the wet summer has been stunted growth of the bracken which often clogs the route down to the river crossing. Once at the river, again, multiple lines of attack of Pen Y Gadair Fawr could be witnessed. As usual, the mountain had managed to grow another 100 feet since the year before but on a personal note, the sodding thing coughed up the ideal ascending line that smooched out the wretched false summits suffered by those going too far the other way. Pen Y Gadair claimed 5 victims this year including second place man Rob Gordon who sadly dropped out at the summit, effectively delivering the race to Mark, who has been on pretty unbeatable form over these distances this year. Mind you, it is a hell of a place to

drop out and Rob was faced with the long slog back from Pen Y Gadair Fawr to Crug Mawr.

The main challenge coming off Pen Y Gadair Fawr is the large bracken field that lurks in the Grwyne valley but, once again, the growth was stunted and weak so the path was easy to find and follow. The welcome splash through the Afon Grwyne gives short lived relief before the vertiginous pull up the lower flanks of Chwarel Y Fan. If it wasn't for the stock fence to hang off, would humans actually be able to get up this without resort to ropes and pitons??

With the sting taken out of fast starters by the first three climbs, the steady grinders could now make their move. A pack of 5 or 6 led by the spritely Dick Finch made mince-meat of the Bal Mawr ridge, blasting past other runners now suffering from that unique fell running torture, the Horizontal Bonk. For some, it was blisters, for others it was cramp, but the attrition rate was building. This gave Del Boy, the summit marshal at Bal Mawr, some wry amusement as old chums came past tails up or half dead depending on their state. But after surviving the carefully hurled Thornley insults, the runners now had to contend with the most intellectually challenging part of the course. The route down through the forest to the

Grwyne and up the other side past Ffordd Las farm is not obvious and to make matters worse, it changes its appearance from year to year thanks to the dual attentions of the Forestry Commission and Mother Nature. Although the first jink into the forest was marked, several missed the markers, since there was no obvious path to draw ones attention. The horrible path up through the forestry above Ffordd Las has now become a dark tunnel due to the overgrowth of trees and the underfoot conditions have deteriorated to a rocky scramble after the recent torrential downpours, the worst in living memory. It was bad enough to force at least one retirement, despite it being the last climb.

No matter, soon enough the field, well strung out now, cursed its way over the last summit, Crug Mawr with only the long 3 mile

run back down to Llanbedr to come. Its a smashing part of the course. Just before the last turn down into the valley, a glance to the right will show the entire course laid out as a reminder of what the runner has endured and conquered. I never tire of that moment, the sense of achievement bucking the overwhelming fatigue and lifting the spirits for one last effort to carry the runner through the orchard, along the lane, over the 2 stiles and down the muddy scramble in the woods. But its never enough to allow a pain-free ascent of the sting in the tail...a 100 foot clamber up a rocky defile into the back of village. Cruel treatment for knackered legs indeed!

The conditions took their toll. Out of 57 starters, 7 retired but all were safely accounted for. Another 4 runners were out for more than 5 hours. Mark Palmer was worthy winner and first vet, arriving home in 2 hours 39 minutes some 5 minutes ahead of Martin Shaw. Despite a sterling run from a rather injured Ruth Pickvance (first Vet Lady), Jackie Lee took the ladies prize and third place overall, winning yet another bottle of champagne for her second hat-trick of wins. The over 50's male winner was Bryan Stadden in 7th place and Dick Finch has found a great streak of form to take the over 60's prize in 19th place with an excellent run of 3 hours 37 minutes. But perhaps the most creditable run of the day came from Senior Vet Chis Kelsey who passed the first check point in 43rd place but pulled himself into 14th place by the end.

If you ever find yourself with a loose end in late September, do yourself a favour and come and do this run. It's tough but friendly and very well organised by the inimitable Puffing Billy. And we all hope your boiler is fixed for the winter, mate!

## **20th UKA Fell and Mountain Running Relays** **Llangynhafal, Denbighshire 19th October 2008**

First of all many thanks to all those who helped to make the Relays happen. Normally the annual British Relay event is hosted by clubs with a strong fell running tradition, e.g. Dark Peak, Eryri Harriers, Mercia Fellrunners and, last year, Bowland Fellrunners. Over a year ago I was asked if the Clwydian Hills might be a suitable venue for the annual relay event and, without thinking too deeply about it, I said yes of course! I sketched out a se-

### **Martin Cortvriend**

ries of courses almost entirely within the Moel Famau Country Park. Denbighshire Countryside Services kindly agreed that we could hold the race and we were up and running.

I joined my local club, Denbigh Harriers, some years ago in order to compete in cross country events – it's a small club with around 30 members and certainly no track record in fell running; nevertheless Denbigh agreed to be the host club as far as race registration was concerned. Thus with a nucleus of Denbigh Harriers on board and the support of WFRA I then had to look around to see what other assistance I could draw on.

Our Cadole Friday night running group, who know these hills intimately, were an obvious resource. I was also extremely lucky that Yiannis Tridimas was able to bring along a very professional team of Bowland Fellrunners (plus Geoff Clegg!) to manage the changeover and finish area which they did supremely well. I managed to recruit scores of marshals from local clubs most notably Clwydian Range Runners but also Denbigh Harriers and Tattenhall Runners and my old

club Macclesfield Harriers, the jungle drums also brought in plenty of additional help with complete strangers calling me to offer their services and local villagers were also intrigued enough to chip in and help out in various ways. The superb Team Dolly and NEWSAR mountain rescue mapped out their positions and, last but not least, I was able to call in the Army! Our club secretary at Denbigh Harriers, Roger Snaith brought a gang of Army Cadets on the Saturday and Sunday to assist with erecting tents and various other duties and my daughter Lyndall and partner Phizz who are also in the Army provided additional logistic support. Further thanks are due to our local farmer Meirion Jones on whose land we parked several hundred vehicles and to Colin and Helen at The Golden Lion who managed to fit dozens of tents in their camping field charging a very modest fee and finally my wife Vicky who remained well out of sight and who has advised me not to offer to host this event again! She did however provide sustenance for many of the marshals and helpers on the day and kept me on an even keel in the weeks leading up to the race.

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### **MIKE COUSINS**

We are sad to report that Mike Cousins has died. Mike lived in Capel Curig and was the Organiser of the Moel Siabod race for a number of years during the 1990's. Although no longer the Organiser he was always around on the day to give a hand if needed. The WFRA would like to send their condolences to his family and friends.

Craig Jones asks . . .

## What is a hard race?

I sit here at the computer with a fuzzy head and a second coffee, the result of an unplanned bottle of wine all to myself late last night.

Whilst mooching about on the fellrunning websites and thinking about all the races I've run this year (22 so far), I began to ponder the concept of what is a hard race?

So what is a hard race?

How often have you heard people say, or even have heard yourself saying when discussing various races in the calendar, "oh yes, that's a hard one". It got me thinking, what exactly makes a race 'hard'?

Is a race hard because it quite simply is hard by virtue of the distance, height gain, the number who fail to complete it, or just the fact that people just say it is?

Take a race such as Llyn Llydaw for instance. It takes place on New Years morning, at a time when the majority of the population are still in bed or are just about up and about nursing a hangover. Despite the fact that it's not particularly long or high, it is 'hard' just because of the circumstances (try it, running with a hangover after only 5 hours sleep isn't much fun!).

Then take the Welsh 1000metres; that's got to be a hard race hasn't it? After all at 22 miles and 8,000 feet of climbing it's one of the longest in the Welsh calendar so it must be hard?

But then again some people are more suited to Long's than others who find it difficult to complete such distances. Some are better suited to the short steep lung-bursting blasts up and down which the long distance specialists find tough as they don't get into their stride. So are they 'hard' too?

Take then the races that are not particularly long or steep, but are just bloody awkward to do because of the terrain being technical and the weather always making it rough, Arenig for instance.

And what about the three Dash's In The Dark? And the Tryfan Downhill Dash? You have to have a few slates missing to take part in the first place, but does it make them 'hard'?

Of course there's always that inexplicable factor that people just know it's 'hard' just because it is. Not for any distance reason, or for its height gain, it's just 'hard' because people say it is. Take the Carneddau race; at 10 miles it's not too long and 4000' of climbing isn't the worst around. Yet how come it kills me, leaving me a

wobbly legged wreck after the descent of Yr Elen?!

And then there's the Rhinog Horseshoe, a race that quite frankly I have had nightmares about. Parts of the route are on the safety limit for anyone without a rope! I've never had a good race on either of these races.

I put it down to the fact that in both these and other races I find very 'hard' the common factor is multiple big climbs and descents coupled with the fact that I had awful races on the first attempt which probably left me a psychological apprehension about them.

I'm sure other runners will have experienced similar mental blocks when they approach certain races where they've had a bad experience. Or maybe I just need some sort of therapy?!

After some considerable deliberating (about five minutes), I came to the conclusion that a scale of hardness is required. I settled on using the mathematical formula of comparing the average feet per mile for each race.

So I consulted the current WFRAs calendar and started calculating the feet per mile of each race and comparing them against each other for their 'hardness'.

The results were often surprising.

There's no doubt that anyone who has done it will certainly confirm that the Peris Horseshoe is a 'very hard' race. And the figures confirm this at a whopping 486' per mile.

There's Fan Fawr which is 500' per mile. On the hardness scale it must surely rank as a contender, but at only 2 miles can it ever be referred to as 'hard'?

Ok, it's only 4 miles long, but we have Moel Hebog at 600' per mile which makes it the highest average climb per mile in the WFRAs calendar. Coupled with the very difficult steep rocky terrain in places this must place it as a contender for being one of the 'hardest' races?

At the end of this (almost certainly pointless) exercise I also discovered that some of the races are incorrectly scored under both the FRA and WFRAs rules listed in the front of the calendar, i.e. at least 100' per mile for Cat C; 125' per mile for Cat B; and 250' per mile for Cat A.

I found that seven races in the calendar have been scored incorrectly on my 'hardness' scale. Based on the figures supplied in the WFRAs calendar the following races are categorised thus:

### THREE PRETENDERS:

The Druid is shown as an AS when it should be BS at 240'.  
Rodneys Pillar is shown as AS when it should be BS at 243.5'.  
Brecon Beacons is shown as AL when it should be BL at 237'.

### THREE FOR PROMOTION:

Sandstone Trail is shown as CL when in fact it should be raised to a BL at 125.7' (just creeping in there, making it by approximately 10 inches!).

Ras Y Mast is shown as CS when it should be BS at 192'.

Mortimers Forest Hill Race is shown as CM when it should be BM at 160'.

Interestingly there is one race which isn't in the slightest bit 'hard', as it doesn't even make a Cat C at 83.3' per mile, and that's the Ron Skiltern Memorial Half Marathon.

Then again, I have no doubt that if you asked most competitors at 12 miles if they were finding it 'hard', I think you'd know what the answer would be!

So next time you're in a post race prizegiving, chewing the fat over which is a 'hard' race, have a ponder on just why you think it is.

Also, do you think the calendar should display the average feet per mile alongside the usual infor-

mation on height gain, distance, category, etc?

If anyone wants a list of my league of 'hardness' of races by virtue of their feet per mile average then feel free to email me for a copy!

As an aside, I note on 'tinternet that someone has measured the Peris Horseshoe route with two GPS's and found it to be 1.2 miles longer than published at 18.7miles, sadly reducing its 'hardness' down to 455'. So I think a reprint is required. No doubt I'll remember how much less hard it is whilst staggering around on the way up Cynghorion.

And this then sparks another debate – should races be more accurately measured for their height gain and distance? Many of the races in the calendar originated long before the invention of satellite navigation and were probably measured with a bit of string on a worn out O.S. Map. Or if it's one of Blakey's evening series', with a wild guess.

I suggest that other races may benefit from having someone run the event with a GPS to provide organisers and competitors alike with an accurate measurement, if only to interest sad anoraks like me!  
*Craig.*

PS - and yes I know, I should get out more. Or maybe finish my living room; it's only taken 8 months so far!!!

### CLWYDIAN RANGE RUNNERS

## DASHES IN THE DARK

### ... FULL(ISH) MOON ADVENTURES

Night time trail races starting from  
LLANDEGLA FOREST VISITOR CENTRE  
LLANDEGLA, WREXHAM

**Friday 23rd Jan**

**Friday 13th Feb**

**Friday 6th March**

Registration from 6pm. Start 7pm over 16 only

### ENTRY ON NIGHT ONLY £3

The course follows a well marked trail of 4 miles with 750' climb. The ground is rough in places  
STUDED SHOES ADVISED!

This is a night time race in winter so there will be a strictly enforced minimum kit requirement:-  
Torch with minimum 2 hrs GOOD lighting head torch preferable. Full waterproof body cover: Jacket and Trousers. Also Hat, Gloves, Compass, Whistle.

Quality of prizes will be similar to those presented over last two years – there will be many more spot prizes than category prizes! There might be half decent series prizes – total cumulative time of all 3 races! No promises though.

For further information: Ben Amesbury tel 01824 707955 or John Montgomery tel 01244 543520 mobile 07841484882

# Helen Fines Reports on South Wales Races

## South Wales Summer Series 2008

Matthew Collins (MDC) made it 3 wins out of 4 to take the South Wales Summer Series, winning Coity, Waun Fach and Guto Nyth Bran. The only man to beat him in the series was overall second placer Harry Matthews of Mynydd Du. Harry also clocked up the highest score of the series- 109% at Mynydd Troed, but the overall strength in other fixtures meant last years winner had to settle for 2nd this time. The consistent Max Suff of Hereford Couriers was 3rd and 1st M40 for the second year running. Under 23 Matthew Stott (Chepstow) finished an excellent 4th overall, his best score coming in the opening fixture at Pen Cerrig Calch back in March, where conditions were anything but summery. Steve Littlewood was 1st M50 and also scored highly at Mynydd Troed.

In the women's competition Emma Bayliss, running for Mynydd Du, was hard to beat after consistent performances in all the fixtures except Llanthony. Her 'best 4' total of 329 points gave her a comfortable victory over Helen Bennett (MDC) with 284. Sharon Woods, also Mynydd Du, was 3rd and 1st F40.

## Machen Race

The Machen race (6.2m/1100ft) attracted the largest field ever this year despite the wet underfoot conditions. Perhaps the competitors were inspired by the Beijing Olympics.

Rhodri Buffett, fresh from his runner-up performance in the World Mountain Running Trophy trial race, led from start to finish in the men's race. The battle for 2nd was a closer affair, with some runners paying for a fast start on the flat section as the climb steepened. Peter Ryder beat Tom Kenderdine into 3rd place by 11 seconds.

The women's race was won by former International mountain runner Ruth Pickvance in 48.14, with summer series winner Emma Bayliss taking second followed by Katie Beecher.

## Brecon Beacons

The in-form Mark Palmer won the 2nd long race in the Welsh Open Championships in the Brecon Beacons (19m/4500ft). After being pushed hard by 3rd-placed Rob Gordon he caught Mercia's Pete Vale, who was having some navigational problems in the mist, and put his descending skills to good use, finishing 1 min 4 secs ahead. He also took the first MV40 prize.

Women's winner Helen Fines took advantage of local knowledge to just edge out Kate Bailey of Meirionnydd in a cat-and-mouse battle of the veterinary surgeons! Mary Gillie was 3rd.

Conditions meant for fairly slow times and tricky route-finding in places, and some interesting lines were taken by the runners. An anonymous 'Welsh Harrier' clearly thought the route would be improved by inclusion of several local villages in addition to the compulsory summit checkpoints! But the real heroes of the day were the marshalls, who spent up to 3 hours on the summits in driving hail and rain.

## Sugar Loaf

Conditions were cold and breezy for the winter Sugar Loaf race (5m/1455ft), and the large field of 116 runners enjoyed snow underfoot at the summit. Spectators were treated to a close finish in the men's race, with Danny Lewis (representing the RAF) beating Peter Ryder of Brycheiniog by just 2 seconds. Danny's father and brother also competed in the race. A below-par Rob Gordon had to settle for third place this time.

In the womens race Helen Fines (Calder Valley) made it a hat-trick of record breaking runs lowering the

course record by a further 25 seconds this year. Chepstow Harriers' Liz Francis was second woman and first FV40. A fast-finishing Helen Bennett just held off the challenge of Lisa Newing for 3rd place.

An encouraging number of juniors entered the race. First male, and 10th overall, was student Matthew Franklin from UWE. First junior female was Naomi Prosser of Hereford AC. Moving towards the other end of the age scale, Crispin Flower (Mynydd Du) was able to celebrate his new status as a vet by taking the first MV40 prize, 8th overall. Bryan Stadden, on a Bitton Road Runners club away-day, was first MV50.

## RHOELL FAWR

### Graeme Stringer

With the jammiest of weather windows a race organiser could wish for, 89 runners took to the fells above Llanfachreth in over-cast, windy but generally dry conditions. The race was won by Richard Roberts of Eryri in 50.01, a time 4 mins faster than his last visit to Rhobell, getting his Winter Series challenge off to a flying start. In second, despite improving his personal best over the course by 36 seconds, was last years Series champion Mathew Roberts of Eryri, finishing in 51.32. Third place, having travelled from South Wales for the race was Harry Mathews in a time of 53.13.

In the veterans categories first man 0/40 was Paul Beeson of Maldwyn Harriers in 57.31, first man 0/50 was Adam Haynes of Eryri in 57.10, and first man 0/60 was Don Williams of Eryri in 1.03.08.

In the ladies section less than 4 minutes separated the first 5 finishers! Anna Bartlett of Shrewsbury returned to the course for the first time since 2005, taking 19 seconds off her personal best to win in 1.00.53. In second place, only 54 seconds behind and fresh from her victory in last weekends "Hellrunner", was Meirionnydd

Running Clubs Kate Bailey, returning to her spiritual home to finish in 1.01.47. In third was Mary Gillie of Clwydian Range Runners in 1.02.14, and in fourth and fifth, continuing their Battle Royal from the 2006 Winter Series, when a mere 39 seconds decided the title, were Phoebe Webster of Aberystwyth University (1.03.15) and Andrea Roberts of Eryri (1.04.16). Any one of these 5 could go on to take the ladies title in the Meirionnydd Winter Series - who has the staying power? Only time will tell....

Age category victories went to Sandra Rowlands of Clwydian Range Runners in 1.10.39 (0/40), Sue Ashton of Chepstow, setting a new age category record of 1.11.34 (0/50), Maggie Oliver of Eryri, who broke Brenda Jones age record with a time of 1.21.33 (0/60), and finally Sheila Symmonds of Bro Dysynni who set a new age record 0/70 in 2.15.00

Winners of the Short/Junior Race were Owain Llyr James in 16.00 with Bronwen Jenkinson first girl in 17.42.

## Fell and Mountain Running Relays

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On race day we were somewhat lucky with the weather, a number of events had been cancelled in other parts of the UK in the weeks leading up to the relays. John Linley, one of my right hand men, had been taken into hospital less than two days before the race and was out of action. Clubs were calling me and e-mailing me at

the last minute to reschedule their team declarations, how was it all going to pan out?

Just as dawn was breaking (I'd already been out for a final marking out stint) the first runner arrived outside our house - this was Joe Blackett who'd driven down from the North East of England. Fortunately Ken and Avril from Denbigh Harriers were fol-

lowing him up the hill and were able to go down and organise him into the car park. And very rapidly everything began to fit together. The cars were parked, the runners were registered, the marshals were out on course and the race was started. Local runner Gilbert from Wrecsam Tri seemed to sprint up the first climb with the pack following him - he ran creditably to come in 11th overall on the first leg, Mike James from Shrewsbury took up a great position in the early stages but fell badly coming in 10th. Mercia Fell-runners had three teams which included 4 of the famous Davies family from Montgomeryshire (Tim, Andrew, Ed and Jacqui.) Without dwelling too much on the race outcome (details at [www.wfra.org.uk](http://www.wfra.org.uk)) Bingley Harriers won the open race with their Olympic triathlete Alistair Brownlee leading them home, they also scooped the ladies prize and Dark Peak Fellrunners won the vets prize. Eryri Harriers did well to come in 8th leading the next Welsh club Mynydd Du who were 11th. A clutch of local teams competed including Buckley, Wrecsam Tri, Wrexham and Clwydian Range Runners showing that fell running is alive and kicking in North East Wales.

As I sit back and reflect on the event some weeks later I'm still astonished at everybody's willingness to help. Those people who just used their initiative at the right time when things might have gone awry are invaluable. The feedback I've had has been amazing - I've had dozens and dozens of e-mails thanking us for a great event at a magnificent venue. The dust has settled, the mountain has recovered remarkably quickly from thousands of studmarks, John Linley has recovered from his illness and I can go back to running solo over the tops to try to regain fitness!

Martin

## 2008-2009 SOUTH WALES WINTER HILL SERIES

7 RACES (best 5 results to count)

All races start at 2.00 p.m. and are on Saturdays

<b>OCTOBER 4 - FAN FAWR</b>	2m/1000ft	£1.00	Over 16
From lay-by near Storey Arms on A470 Merthyr Brecon rd (GR SN 983203) Organiser: Chris Gildersleve (029 2062 4143) e-mail: <a href="mailto:gildersleve@ntlworld.com">gildersleve@ntlworld.com</a>			
<b>NOVEMBER 1 - SUGAR LOAF</b>	5m/1400ft	£2.50	Over 16
From The Crown, Pantygelli, nr Abergavenny (GR SO 302179) Organiser: Douglas Adlam (07950 106886)			
<b>NOVEMBER 29 - THE BLORENGE</b>	2.5m/1400ft	£2.00	Over 16
From Llanfoist Inn, Llanfoist, nr. Abergavenny (GR SO 286133) Organisers: Chris & Jessica Taylor			
<b>JANUARY 10 - THE KYMIN</b>	3.95m/1150ft	£2.50	Over 14
From Monmouth Boys School Sports Centre. Organiser: Rod Jones (01600 772400) e-mail: <a href="mailto:rod@rodjonesmountain.fsnet.co.uk">rod@rodjonesmountain.fsnet.co.uk</a>			
<b>JANUARY 31- LLANTHONY</b>	2m/1150ft	£2.00	Over 16
From Llanthony Abbey car park (GR SO 289278) Organiser: Dick Finch (01291 627569) e-mail: <a href="mailto:DickFinch@talktalk.net">DickFinch@talktalk.net</a>			
<b>FEBRUARY 28 - LONGTOWN</b>	3.2m/1150ft	£2.00	Over 14
From The Crown, Longtown, Herefordshire Organiser: Hanneke Van Der Werf (01873 860401) e-mail: <a href="mailto:hanneke3@btinternet.com">hanneke3@btinternet.com</a>			
<b>MARCH 28 - PEN CERRIG CALCH</b>	3m/1500ft	£1.50	Over 16
From Ty Mawr Farm, nr. Llanbedr (GR SO 234206) Organiser: Derek Thornley (029 2089 1172) e-mail: <a href="mailto:derek@dtltd.com">derek@dtltd.com</a>			

# Laugavegur Mountain Ultra-Marathon, Iceland

Simon G. Roberts

Running through an active volcanic landscape takes some getting used to. One minute you're plodding along nicely, the next minute your foot sinks into soft black ash, or starts heating up alarmingly as you pass over yet another steaming, sulphurous hole in the ground.

In July, I ran the Laugavegur ultra marathon through the mountains of the Icelandic interior. The route followed by the race is quite well known (by Icelandic standards) as a 4-day hut-to-hut backpacking tour, but once a year an organised race of international mountain-running enthusiasts storms it in a single day. The race is about 55k, or 35 miles, with a few thousand feet of climbing and a great deal of unusually awkward volcanic terrain. In short, plenty for any sensible Welsh fell runner to get his or her teeth into.

More importantly, the landscape traversed is truly sensational and remarkably diverse throughout. So much so that I continually found an excuse to rest my aching limbs, stop and fire off a few dozen photographs after the race with a relatively clear conscience. Indeed, on a couple of occasions I embarrassed myself in front of the Icelandic contingent by laughing out loud at the extravagance of the landscape constantly unfolding in front of the runners.

The first challenge for myself and running companion Dave Lyman was waking up in our Reykjavik hotel at 3.30am, not a time of day I am particularly familiar with, to begin the four hour journey on a huge-wheeled off-road bus to the start. In midsummer, it never gets dark in Iceland, but it does get rather a lot of 'weather'. As a result, the drizzly walk to the bus was deeply dispiriting. Picture a wet November afternoon in Bethesda and you'll have some idea.

The adventurous tone to the day began immediately, with rough tracks and rivers negotiated before arriving at the beautiful flat valley of Landmannalaugur – renowned for its multi-coloured volcanic peaks and naturally warm geothermal springs. Miraculously, the depressing clag of 3.30am had cleared during the drive to reveal this wonderful landscape. Things were looking up, and I changed into my kit in a state of high excitement. The race

had been quite some time in the planning and I was looking forward to getting to grips with the wild Icelandic interior after a few days in urban Reykjavik.

The record field of around 250 then began the race with a long climb up to a hanging valley containing a lush green meadow (the last greenery we were to see for quite some time) and some golden plover (the only wildlife seen all day). A brief, cruelly misleading flat interlude led to a steep ridge with steam rising from volcanic vents in the earth on both sides. Clear evidence of previous eruptions in the form of jagged lava flows made progress a little unnerving – the prospect of trying to outrun a surge of molten lava was not something I wanted to dwell on.

After a long but fun climb, we arrived at the volcanic summit of Hrafninnusker, which is characterised by fields of obsidian which shimmer even in the mist, like thousands of tiny black mirrors. We entered the cloud just below the summit, and crossed some long, arduous snowfields before reaching the first hut on the plateau itself. This was a hostile place, the temperature was down to around 4 degrees, and the chocolate and refreshments offered by friendly marshals were much appreciated.

After running across this extraordinary volcanic plateau, through clouds of steam, old lava flows and glacial terrain, the route reaches a ridge known as Jokultungur. At this point the tendrils of mist which had added atmosphere to the plateau crossing but hidden wider views suddenly cleared to reveal a stupendous view over the landscape that we had left to traverse. This was real 'Norse God' territory, with sharp volcanic peaks, enormous glaciers, gorges and river valleys stretching out to the horizon with no sign of human influence or habitation. The race then headed steeply down scree to the second checkpoint at the lake of Alftavatn. I was able to pass several runners on this Welsh-style descent and felt quite at home.

After more food, we crossed a horrifically cold river fed by glacial meltwater. This was the first of numerous agonising river crossings, where the current was often quite strong. Indeed, waist-high



The early stages of the race, mist clearing from the summit of Reykjafjoll in the distance

wellies and a burly Icelandic farmer are provided to assist the runners across the most ferocious of the river crossings at the half way point. Not enough assistance for one British runner, however, who (I was later told) contrived to trip and measure his length in the icy water. This must have been a truly distressing experience. After this drama came a hallucinatory interlude as we crossed a remarkable pancake-flat lava field below the vast icecap of Myrdasjokull for around 10 miles. Sharp peaks covered in green moss fringed the horizon, but the soft black sand underfoot and monotonous nature of the running began to take its toll as the route began to climb again.

At the third and final hut of Botnar, the rain was ferocious. I picked from a tray of floating bounty bars and girded my loins for the final section. At this point, we'd already covered marathon distance, so a steep descent on fine lava sand followed by a very wet, slippery scramble down rock on ropes to a spectacular gorge demanded a fair amount of concentration. This was the home strait, though, and the final 12k or so involved a smaller climb to crest a ridge then a long traverse of a friendlier river valley before one last cruel climb and a final appallingly cold river crossing.

The finish at Thorsmork, a wooded (by Icelandic standards) valley, was a delight. Friendly, helpful faces all around, a fine bunch of international mountain enthusiasts, and – best of all – a natural geothermal spring below a towering crag in which to ease our aching limbs. A barbeque of Icelandic lamb provided a fitting post-race repast, with each runner's name and time announced individually at the end. The rain was by now torrential but Icelanders, like the Welsh, have the valuable ability to ignore it and get on with the business in hand as if they really live in Andalucia.

I finished in 70th place after a ludicrously inappropriate final sprint alongside a Brit and an Icelander, finishing in 6.5 hours. Even if I had the fitness to race effectively over this distance and terrain, I'm not sure I'd have had the inclination on this occasion. The scenery and general ambience was just too impressive and I'm a great one for excuses.

I ended up with around 60 photographs, iced feet that took a day to thaw out, and the memory of a near-perfect mountain traverse. In fact the only negative was that famous Icelandic cliché, the price of beer, which would have required me to take out a second mortgage to drink.

*The WFR A Committee wish all  
members a*

*Very Merry Christmas*

*and a*

*Happy New Year*

# Secretary's notes . . .

## Navigation Course

The WFRA organized another successful Navigation Course on Sunday 16th November in Llanberis. The course was run by Iain and Sarah Ridgeway of Snowdonia Running Guides. The next course will be in the Spring.

We can all benefit from further instruction in Navigation and I would urge members to consider going. For more details visit the WFRA website or contact Ross Powell.

## WFRA Champs/Series 2008

The Presentations took place after the Rhobell Fawr race in North Wales on 8th November. Congratulations to all the prizewinners. I would like to thank all the sponsors – Innovate, Ultimate Outdoors, Benards Gallery and

Run and Become. They have all been very generous so please give them your support.

## WFRA Champs/Series 2009

Details are shown on page 1 of this Newsletter. There will be no change in the format of the Championships and Series in 2009. We will, however, be setting up a sub committee to investigate possible changes for future years.

The North and South Wales Series are becoming increasingly popular but we would like to see more participation in the Open/Welsh Championships. Remember you only have to travel North/South for one race to complete the maximum of four races. Now that petrol prices are falling why not make the effort in 2009?

The North Wales Series kicks off with Tarren Hendre on 24th January.

The Rhinog Horseshoe Race on 4th July is included in the Open/Welsh Championships and North Wales Series. Please note that this is an arduous race in remote terrain. Entrants must be good navigators and have completed at least two fell races at least 10 miles in length in the previous 12 months. You are recommended to retrace the section from Rhinog Fawr to the Bwlch. If you are lacking confidence with navigation then put your name down for the next WFRA Navigation Course.

## British Relay Champs 2008

These took place in the Clwydian Hills on Sunday 19th October. Martin Cortvriend and his band of helpers are to be congratulated for organizing an excellent event. This is the biggest event that can be organized in the sport of fell running. Fell running has certainly come a long way in North East Wales in the last few years!



Ross Powell

## Membership Renewals

These are now due. The membership year runs from 1st January to 31st December.

Subscriptions are to remain unchanged at £10. If you received a hard copy of this Newsletter then you should have also received a membership renewal form (if you have not already renewed). If you received your Newsletter by e mail then membership

renewal forms are available on the WFRA website – [www.wfra.org.uk](http://www.wfra.org.uk). Click on 'Join' and print off the 2009 form. If you are renewing your membership you only have to indicate any changes to your details. If there are no changes then fill in your name, write 'no changes' then sign and date the form and return with your fee.

## 2009 WFRA Race Calendar

This will be ready soon and will be sent to you when your membership renewal is received.

## JUNIOR RACES

There will not be a Junior North Wales Series in 2009. There will, however, be two more localized Series – Snowdonia Junior Series and Clwydian Junior Series. More details of both below.

## SNOWDONIA JUNIOR SERIES

Details are still being finalized and will be published on the WFRA website in the New Year or contact Ross Powell for more information. It will probably commence in April.

## CLWYDIAN JUNIOR SERIES

Run 1 March 22nd  
Run 2 May 31st  
Run 3 Sept 20th

Venues and Times to be decided.

More details on WFRA website or from

Mary Gillie, 89b Tarvin Road, Chester, CH3 5EF, 01244 347560  
[marygillie1@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:marygillie1@yahoo.co.uk)

## Your number's up!

### Dave Hancock becomes a marshalling old hand

Following my successful marshalling debut on the 2007 Penmaenmawr Fell Race (when my authoritative management of an open gate was widely acclaimed), I was fully expecting to be elevated in terms of marshalling duties for the 2008 version. Sorting safety pins or ironing race numbers in the warmth of the HQ. Despatching fellow marshals into the cold and wet with a cheery wave from the warmth of the HQ. Dashing outside to shout "Go!" to the assembled runners before returning to the warmth of the HQ. These were the duties I had in mind.

Organiser, Chris Near, did not share my dreams. Instead, I was allocated The Quarry. Not, you understand, marshalling from the warmth of the quarryman's hut but at grid reference 705750 instead. A quick glance at the map confirmed there was indeed a quarry nearby (several, in fact). Unfortunately, there was rock-all else. No teashop, no ice cream parlour, no coffee bar – just rocks.

Sensing my disappointment, Chris quickly added that I'd have a clipboard. Now we're talking. A marshal without a clipboard is just a wet, miserable nobody in a plastic tabard. A marshal with a clipboard is a wet, miserable somebody in a plastic tabard.

Aware of my self-importance, I cunningly arranged not to be at the race start – we all know bribery of marshals is endemic within fell running. Instead, I rendezvoused at the home of fellow Eryri Harriers member, Ellie Salisbury. In order not to risk accusations of inducement, Ellie deliberately served me toast flambé and tea a la Arctic.

Under cover of darkness, Chris Near had deposited my marshalling kit at Ellie's the previous evening. This comprised a code book disguised as a survival blanket, a first aid kit that could be used to make a wireless set and a small punch bag. Thinking the lastitem was a mistake, I left it behind only to learn later that it was a Kisu which, when inflated, becomes a small teashop. Most importantly, I had a clipboard. Not, you must understand, a cheap clipboard from W H Smith – this was a special titanium clipboard with flip-up rain cover and built-in hand warmer. In case of capture, a marshal can eat it and die within 24 days.

Armed with my clipboard, I made my way to the checkpoint under cover of low mist navigating with the aid of my trusty Garmin special issue GPS. As arranged, I met the Thunderbirds rescue team there and we exchanged coded greetings.

As is my habit, I had brought jelly babies with me for the runners. Sadly, no sooner did I put the container of JBs on the ground than the Thunderbirds dogs licked them. I washed them in a pool of stagnant water (which must have had Fairy

Liquid in it as it was all foamy) and dried them in the exhaust of the Thunderbirds Land Rover.

The runners began to arrive and I soon realised there would be a problem. Let me spell it out. If you are competing in a race and some idiot wearing a bright orange plastic bag with MARSHAL on it is standing in the middle of nowhere with a clipboard and pen poised, they are not completing a survey of your shopping habits. They are, however, seeking information. Try to think what that could be – I'll give you a clue, it's a number. Your car registration number? Nope. Your PIN number? Nope. The serial number of your washing machine? Nope.

The correct answer is your race number, which, as a sop to those with a short attention span, the organisers give competitors at the start on a piece of paper. Most runners choose to display said number prominently on a forward-facing part of their body. As they approach the clipboard-wielding marshal, they recognise that he's an old fool with failing eyesight and rain cascading from his eyebrows – so they shout out their number.

Others demonstrate much more inventiveness. They pin the number to a rear-facing part of their anatomy but forget to run backwards. They hide the number about their person in the mistaken belief that marshals are psychic (some are but only when walking on water). Some hide their number behind an outer jacket. A runner unzipping their jacket as they approach a marshal of the opposite gender can generate more sweat within the orange tabard. The subsequent disappointment as only a number is revealed is a cruel trick.

Fortunately, WFRA rules allow for such inventiveness to be stamped out. I was lenient this year but will be strict from now on. So, expect the following punishments.

Failure to run backwards when wearing a number on your back: 10 press-ups at each marshal's post

Failure to display a number: A round of drinks for all the marshals at the finish

Failure to display a well-muscled, hairy chest when unzipping an outer jacket: male runners, sing one Abba song; female runners, sing every Abba song.

Having ticked off each runner (including some disguised as backpackers who at first insisted they weren't in the race and didn't have a number but who eventually owned up to being 007 before running off), I closed my special clipboard and laid a hair from my head across the hinge.

The Thunderbirds crew gave me a lift off the mountain and I trusted them with taking the clipboard to HQ. They tell me it was very warm there...



# A half marathon to remember!

Continued from page 1

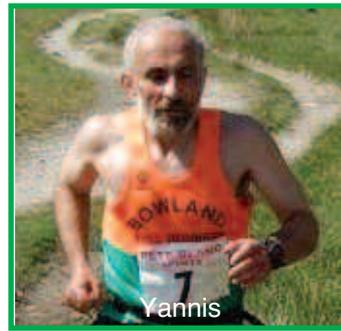
Gap and saw large numbers of people walking down the path to Borrowdale. Ray's map took off and landed in a small gully. He went after it and I carried on up Aaron Slack. We had just enough time left to get back without incurring time penalties. Over Windy Gap and down along Moses Trod the wind was as bad as ever and every so often we were blown over as were others around us. We made our way to Dubbs Bottom hoping to pick up the path from Dubbs quarries to descend to the finish. As we got lower we saw the small valley looking like a lake. We paused and observed people attempting to cross it and turning back. The stream on our right coming down from Brandreth looked violent. After a few attempts to cross it we gave up and headed for the path that goes past Blackbeck tarn, hoping to make our way down to Buttermere that way. Along the path we met up with Nicky Spinks and partner coming the other way. They said that Warnscale bottom was flooded and we wouldn't be able to cross it. We followed them to the flooded valley at Dubbs bottom. We were by now well out of contention. All we wanted to do was get down to the camp. If we could not cross this flood we contemplated heading for Honister and Borrowdale. The other two went ahead and found a crossing. We followed them and got across-wading up to our waist. On the way down I was certain that the event was doomed. Soon the flooded valley came into view. I have never seen so much water either in Cumbria or in Wales. The portalos were in the water. That's it, the overnight camp is under water, I said. The OMM is off.

We were not disappointed. We had wasted half of the time dodging streams and were getting back with more time penalties than score.

We were instructed to go into a large barn. The place was full of people and the concrete floor was muddy. We put on some dry clothes under the wet ones and met up with John Hunt and John Morgan, the elite pair with whom we stayed at Newlands hall on Friday night.

I was not keen to spend the night in the barn. I enquired whether we could return to Seathwaite and was told that Honister pass was closed and people were sent back. I then decided to make an exodus to Newlands via Newlands Hause, it would be around one and a half hours on the road. Surprisingly the others did not want to follow me. I suggested that I would go on my own and would bring Ray's car back for them. That was a more plausible plan and John Morgan joined me.

We waded through flooded sections of the road and on the way up to the house we agreed that we felt warmer than at any time during the day. John Hunt picked up a lift from the barn and as he passed us he said he would drive Ray's car back to pick us up. Soon we also hitched a lift to Stair and John



drove to the barn to pick Ray up. Lawrie Jones got a lift from Seathwaite to Newlands, leaving partner Alan Duncan to spend the night in John's camper van.

At Newlands hall we had some food, dried our clothes and then drove to the pub at Swinside where we had a most enjoyable evening drinking fine ale and feeling sorry for those staying in the barn. Lawrie's internet phone was our source of news. The media were buzzing about the great disaster that had overtaken two and a half thousand adventurers.

Next morning after the floods had subsided, we drove to Seathwaite where we were reunited with our friends and had food. Those who stayed at the barn in Buttermere were making their way to Seathwaite on foot via Honister. They looked tired and were covered in mud. We certainly had a much better Saturday night than most. *Yiannis 31/10/08*

## CILCAIN 08

Race day dawned, after the snow and gales of the previous week, drizzly. At least it was not that cold and conditions were reasonable for the race. A warning of some snow in Stony Gully only produced a cheer of expectation. I expected some cold feet from the odd patches of snow, by now turning into a cold, muddy slush.

For me there is little to do on race day. My colleagues from NEWSAR were doing the hard work, manning the checkpoints and organising the hall. Especial thanks must go to my head time-keeper Geoff Clegg. His offer to help was gratefully received, and removed my greatest worry for race day. I simply have to say "Go" and hand out the prizes.

Proceeds from the race help NEWSAR, and will cover a significant amount of the cost of a new traction splint, a piece of kit we all hope that we will not use.

The race will be back again next year, but with a new course. Different, but no less challenging, and it will offer increased options of route choice. For those who rely on fell runners navigation, i.e. following the runner in front, I would advise attending the navigation courses organised by both the WFRA and FRA.

The route will then alternate each year, with the Odd and Even races with their own set of records.

I have finally produced an algorithm and method that allows me to generate the team results easily. My rules are simple, the first three athletes, irrespective of age or gender, to count.

	Score
1 Buckley Runners	18
2 Tattenhall	34
3 Eryri	38
4 Clwydian Range Runners	52
5 Liverpool Harriers	80
6 Wreccsam Triathlon	153
7 Spectrum Striders	171

*Pete Taylor*

## ARENIG FAWR FELL RACE

28th September 2008

This was the third running of the race and so far everything has gone according to plan. This year the race was run in ideal conditions – overcast and mild with good visibility. Low cloud and drizzle in the morning gave way to more settled weather that lasted all afternoon. Numbers were down from last year due to other events taking place the day before in Wales. Lloyd Taggart, in his first appearance in this race, set a new course record and despite an injured knee he managed to stay ahead of previous winner and record holder Richard Roberts, who also finished inside his own record. Andrea Roberts turned the tables on record holder Anna Bartlett, beating her into second place.

Team Dolly turned up again in force to support the race with radio communications at the check points and to provide high quality photography.

I would like to thank Geoff Clegg for yet again doing the timing and all my friends who marshalled.

As on previous occasions, Running Bear supported the event by

providing prizes at a generous discount.

There were 59 starters and all completed the race.

Next year the race will take place on Sunday 4th October. The entry fee will be increased to £4 in order to cover most of the expenditure for the many prizes I like to give out. *Yiannis Tridimas*

### NO TABLES!

Unfortunately due to a technical problem when trying to convert tables into a format suitable for this newsletter I am unable to include them. They will be on the website in about a weeks time. Bob the webmaster is offline at the moment.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this edition. Please keep the articles/reports/photos coming in for our next newsletter which is due out in April

*Geoff Clegg*

### Members Discounts

The shops listed below have confirmed that they will give WFRA members a discount on purchases. This may not be on all items (eg sale items). Discount is normally 10% unless indicated otherwise.

You must show your WFRA membership card.

#### BENARD'S GALLERY

Craig y Don, Llandudno

#### BLACKS

Betws y Coed and Llandudno

#### CONWY OUTDOOR SHOP

Conwy

#### ULTIMATE OUTDOORS

Betws y Coed, Skipton, Keswick and Lancaster

#### JOE BROWN SHOPS

Llanberis and Capel Curig

#### COTSWOLD

Betws y Coed

#### RUN AND BECOME

Cardiff

#### RUNNING BEAR

Altrincham

#### Y WARWS

Beddgelert

If there are other retailers members would like to be included please contact any Committee member

# 4 Cardinal Summits of Wales

TOM GIBBS

AUGUST 2008

Typically the weather forecast for the day of my attempt, Saturday 9th August, was awful, in keeping with the rest of the summer. If the weather had thought it had scuppered me then it was in for a surprise, the forecast for the Friday before, was great – dry, sunny, not too warm and a slight north-westerly to boot – so after a quick discussion with my ace support crew, Phill, we decided to take the Friday off and have a go a day early. This later proved to be a masterstroke as Saturday was one of the worst days of the summer so far.

So Thursday evening saw us driving up to North Wales to stay with "The Boy Wonder" Andy Mullett in his holiday cottage near Tremadog. This was a spot to relax and prepare for the next day. Friday morning, we were up at 6am aiming for a 7:30 start and a great journey the length of Wales.

The 4 Cardinal Summits are Snowdon - the Highest in Wales, Cadair Idris - the most Magical, Plynlimon - source of the Wye and Severn and Pen y Fan - the highest in South Wales. With cycling in-between the distances work out at 22 miles and 8000ft of climb on foot, over 110 miles and 9000ft of climb by bike. I knew the route from having done the route South to North back in 2001 with good friend and one time Welsh Ironman record holder Keri James in the current record of 14:26 minutes. This time would be North to South and I hoped to knock a good chunk off the record, aiming for sub 12 hrs.

So 7:36 am saw me starting a Pen y pass. The cloud was about 600 me

tres and I was worried that the forecasted good weather would stay away. I aimed to take it steady up Snowdon and tried my best to hold back, as I approached the summit I broke out of the cloud into sunshine, it was going to be a great day after all. Construction of the new summit café/station was in full swing. At 8:30 am, they workers must be on a good rate! The descent took me down the Rhyd Ddu path and on to the bike after 1hr 30mins, bang on schedule.

After a speedy transition I was off on my road bike and was quickly enjoying the descent to Beddgelert. To make the most of the various roads, I'd got a bit serious on the bike front this time bringing with me a Road Bike (Willier Cento), a Time Trial Bike (Willier Lavaredo complete with Disc Wheel and Aero Helmet) and my Whyte 19 Hardtail mountain bike. All this lead to much amusement for my Fell club.

By now the weather was warm-ing up and the sun out. I was quickly in the groove on the bike, nipping over the climb from Garreg to Rhyd and down past the Ffestiniog railway to Meantwrog. Next climb was the long slog up to the A470 junction. Here I switched to the TT bike for the fast section of road to Dolgellau. This section was super fast with me averaging well over 25mph. All to soon I was on the outskirts of Dolgellau and back on the Cento for the climb up to the Hotel at the start of the Foxes Path. I'd knocked the 36 miles from Rhyd Ddu off in 1hr 45, putting me slightly ahead of schedule.

Next up was the crux of the route, Cadair Idris, still too early to be going hard, but the hardest climb and descent of all the hills. I tried to keep a lid on my effort whilst still making good time. It's a tough climb up the Foxes path, with the loose scree on the upper slopes, it was also getting warm-towards midday. After 52 minutes I

touched the trig and after a (very) brief look at the view and a bit of banter with some walkers I was heading down. Here I took the very steep and rough path down the crags to Llyn Idris. This was a really quad-buster, reinforced by the unrelenting steps all the way to the valley floor. It took over 30 minutes to descend, and I'd lost a few minutes on my schedule, but felt that I'd not put too much into the hill. With less than 5 hours gone, I was glad to have the 2 hardest hills behind me. Getting back onto my Cento was a pleasure and I headed out of Snowdonia towards Machynlleth and my next peak, Plynlimon.

Previously we had taken the roads to Tal-y-bont and around Nant-y-moch. I'd worked out a shorter off-road route that I thought would save me 15 minutes or so. Jumping on the MTB, I pedalled a direct line south towards Plynlimon. A big off-road climb brought me out onto the large plateau of wilderness that characterises the area. A good track exists that leads all the way to the ford through Afon Hengwm where wet feet was the order of the day. Here was the tightest transition for my support crew. Phill had to race round via the roads, 20 miles further, then run 1 mile on a track to meet at the best changeover spot. Unfortunately I was too fast – getting to the transition 4 minutes before him!

After this slight delay I was quickly clambering over the tussocks and picked up the big track to Llyn Llygad Rheidol. From here a good line to me up to the top of Plynlimon. Here I had my first sight of the last hill of the day, Pen y Fan and boy did it look a long way away! The descent of Plynlimon is good and I quickly picked up the big track by the mines that led to Eisteddfa Gurig. 50 mins for Plynlimon and I had now been out for over 7 hours 15 mins. A quick look at the schedule showed that sub 11 hours was possible, if I could maintain a good pace.

Here I used my (not so) secret weapon, doing the Aero Helmet and jumping on the TT bike for the fast A roads to Llangurig, Rhayader and Builth Wells. After about 3 miles of over 30mph riding I noticed a police car coming the other way with the Copper staring at me – Quickly I was thinking, do they think I am racing? If so where are the permissions? Next thing I know the police car had turned around and came back past me. I was now thinking of my excuses and wondering if the attempt was to be stopped by a night in the cells!

Then I saw the Police Car pulled up in the next lay-by with the Copper (not in uniform) getting out – perhaps he is undercover (in a blatantly marked Car) I thought? I slowed down and to my surprise the Policeman asked if I was Tom and he explained that he was Moley, a member of the Fell Club!

Relief at not being in trouble was quickly followed by annoyance at being stopped, but at least now I had a potential police escort for a few miles. Back on the case I tore through Llangurig and the superb stretch of road to Rhayader, which saw me clock 23 minutes for a 10-mile stretch. I continued on to Builth, blessed with a slight



Tom Gibbs

tailwind and generally descending roads.

At the Showground I jumped back on the Cento for the last stage of the cycling – over the Sennybridge range to Upper Chapel and Brecon. Just leaving Builth, I spied a cyclist who appeared to be waiting for me. As I got closer I realised that it was, Toffer, one of the regular South Wales madmen who had cycled out to ride the last bit with me. It was a great moment that lifted my spirits and helped me maintain my pace over a tough stretch of road. To stop any cries of assistance I diligently made sure that I never drafted behind him, climbing side by side over the 1 in 4 climb. Soon we were descending in to Brecon, nipping through back streets to avoid the early evening rush, then climbing up to Cwm Gwdi Car Park. This was a real sting in the tail with a nastily steep road up to the last transition. By this time 10 hours had elapsed and I knew that I had to keep on the pressure to beat 11 hours.

The climb up the North ridge of Pen y Fan is a big one; steep at the bottom it only relents for a short while before the final steep section. Here I was on my knees, feeling the effects of the day, and a 24-hour race 2 weeks previously. I was so glad to clamber up to the cairn at the summit. I had it to myself as well. A quick glance behind to look at the way I had come. Plynlimon was barely visible, Cadair Idris and Snowdon, lost to the mists and the curvature of the Earth. It struck me at the length of this journey.

I had no time to stop and contemplate, as the climb had taken 40 minutes and I had only 20 to get down to the finish. I sped down familiar paths, surprised to find that the nasty cobbles had been replaced by a much more runner friendly surface. Quickly I realised that the 11 hours was safe and I began to think about my long day on the hills and how much the character of the landscape had changed from the rocks of the North to the remote wilds of Mid Wales and the grassy moorland of the South. All to soon I was crossing the bridge to the gate at the Car Park and the finish, 10 hours 57 minutes after starting at Pen y Pass.

Huge thanks go to Phill - my one-man support demon, Toffer - for the company on that last bike ride, Moley - for the police escort and making me think I was about to be arrested, My wife Astrid - for putting up with me and ATB Sales - for bike support with my great selection of machines.

Tom



RICHARD ROBERTS

Richard pictured immediately after the Rhobell race before dashing off to a friends wedding. The framed picture is his prize for winning the North Wales Series and the engraved glass perpetual trophy is for winning the Open Welsh Championships

## CNICHT RACE

The Cnicht race took place from Croesor, near Porthmadog, on Sunday 24th August. There was a large turnout as the race was a counter in the Welsh Fell Runners Association North Wales Series. The weather was mostly dry with sunny intervals. It was wet and slippery underfoot.

The race was won by Richard Roberts of Eryri in a time of 36 minutes and 30 seconds. Matt Gilbert of Wrexham Tri was 2nd in 36.43 and Roland Stafford of Mercia was 3rd in 38.01. Other category winners - Over 40 Paul Jenkinson (Eryri) 41.22, Over 50 Graham McAra (Cheshire) 44.56, Over 60 Don Williams (Eryri) 46.16.

Andrea Roberts of Eryri was first to the summit in the ladies race but was passed on the descent by clubmate Jenny Heming who went on to win in a time of 45.23. Andrea Roberts was 2nd in 47.51 and Mary Gillie (Clwydian) 3rd in 48.32. Other category winners - Over 40 Amanda Wilde (Meirionnydd) 52.30, Over 50 Mandy Whitehead (u/a) 70.28, Over 60 Maggie Oliver (Eryri) 62.28. Ross