

# FELL RACE MEMORIES

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...With no fell-racing looking likely for a while, sit back and enjoy some arm-chair fellrunning as NFR's recall their 'best and worst fell races'. Many thanks to the contributors. The editor hopes you enjoy reading the articles as much as he has.



## Dave Ailano writes

**My worst race** had to be the Three Shires 2019. In the late summer heat I seemed to be walking backwards up Wetherlam. For ever. What was left in my legs was sapped by Swirl How, and then drained by Pike o Blisco. Could hardly raise a jog going past Blea Tarn and started to feel decidedly ropey going up Lingmoor Fell. The rest of the racers went past as I just couldn't get going.

I think I finished as it was the quickest way back so no point in pulling out! I managed a slow jog in along the road to save face!

Some people's best races involve a PB or top placing, mine feature actually finishing. Highlights of mine are beating the Yorkshire 3 peaks and Ben Nevis cut offs, and finishing any fell race with a younger person behind me.

**My best fell race** was the Carnethy 5 in February this year. Memorable for the great atmosphere, abysmal weather (which made it more satisfying to complete) and my first fell race wearing leggings. A few hills, but relatively small compared to Three Shires. I still had energy to push on for the run in over the bog and overtook someone who went bog snorkelling! Great fun!

### Old Cheviot's OCT

On the day of the Old County Tops,  
My tummy requested pit stops;  
On completing the round,  
I fell to the ground,  
And out came the puke with great plops.

By Emma Bain—see page 2

## Fraser Brown writes

As a relative newcomer to our fine sport, I have rapidly learned how to simultaneously enjoy and suffer.

### Best Race – Tigger Tor 2020

I was excused from a family weekend break in the Peak District to enjoy a local highlight. A navigation race involving 11 checkpoints around and including Higger Tor and neighbouring Tors and Edges; combining technical scrambles and runnable descents.

I felt fresh and energetic throughout a damp and blustery race, finishing a respectable 61<sup>st</sup> from 372 finishers. I prepared well, felt competitive throughout the race and enjoyed every step of the way – can't have tried enough!

### Worst Race – Teenager with Altitude 2019

A scorching April day found me beginning the climb up Causey Pike. Unlike the course, it was downhill from there. Feeling reasonable by the time I gained Grasmoor things turned nasty.

A never-ending descent to Newlands Hause trashed half of my body and the rebound up Robinson destroyed the remainder. I will remember every inch of my stagger to Dale Head where I pulled enough of myself together to lurch on to Catbells and finally stop. I later learned 43 of 180 starters failed to finish so I was grateful to finish.

## John Duff writes

### My best race - Chevy Chase 2008

Conditions were ideal - a cool day, dry underfoot, and plenty of folk to race in the latter stages. I ran in with Garry Owens over the last few miles. Garry prevailed, but he pulled me along to 5th place overall and my quickest time of 3 hours 15 minutes. It was my best performance at one of my favourite races.

### My worst race - Old County Tops 2012

I felt sick most of the way round, could eat very little, and had to stop for an extended breather on the killer climb out of Cockley Beck. My running partner Scott Gibson nobly waited for me as John Telfer waltzed past us near Blea Tarn. I repaid Scott's loyalty by collapsing at the finish for 15 minutes, declining all offers of tea/soup etc, before struggling to the toilet to throw up.

I have never been so close to pulling out of a race. In the evening, Scott and John enjoyed the beer at The Old Dungeon Ghyll, I stuck to water. But at least I finished the race.



John Duff following Rachel Vincent on The Chevy Chase 2008. Photo—Pat Dunn

## John Tollitt writes

**A race that stands out for me as a real stinker** was the 16 mile Pentland Skyline in 2011. It's a classic race of 2 halves with the first half being a nice runnable roller coaster and the second being a horrible boggy slog. I totally bonked with about 4 miles to go and recall John Telfer passing me by and looking at me and asking if I was ok as I was probably looking like I was about to collapse. I think my problem was I hadn't eaten sufficiently before or during the race but managed to finish it with the aid of some flapjack that a kindly marshal gave me.

**A race that stands in contrast** (although not strictly a fell race and I wasn't running for NFR) was the Jungfrau Marathon the following year. Another race of 2 halves with the first being flat(ish) and the second ascending up to the foot of the North Face of the mighty Eiger.

The views are literally breathtaking and I just felt better and better as the race progressed and didn't want it to finish. Sustenance was provided at various points en-route in the form of flavoured nougat (yum yum).



John Tollitt at the Jungfrau Marathon

## Paul Appleby writes

**Best Fell Race 1. - Kielder Borderer 17m/3,000ft - 20.02.2011 - Aka Fell Race from Hell.**

Although this race no longer exists, I can't recall anyone having much positive to say about it with endless tussock, bog, heather and bracken but I always remember having decent runs at Kielder. This particular day had it all, wet snow on ground, cold wind and visibility down to 50 ft in places. The race was run anti-clockwise for a change and the wind on top of the first climb Deadwater Fell was bitter.

Eight to ten runners seemed to converge on the Knoxe Knowe check point from different directions (surely one of the remotest of all check points in the UK) and from thereon in it was a case of safety in numbers to some degree.

Everyone's feet were numb from the wet lying snow but it was still encouraging to find the famous elusive trods through the heather. Approaching Three Pikes one or two small gaps were appearing and I remember thinking it odd to be in the company of some pretty decent runners and felt strong.

Once Grey's Pike was gained it was mainly downhill to the finish and my competitive nature seemed to ramp up a gear. I flew down through the trees knowing there weren't many in front of me and gave it everything to the finish. A top three finish and less than a minute behind the winner. Gibson/Addyman/Bennett, I may never have beaten you before or since that day but I did beat you then and I will never forget it.

**Best Fell Race 2 - Glenshee 9 21m/6,000ft - 09.08.2009 - 4h 42m 24s**

I incorporated this race into a long weekend away with Wendy. We were camping in a duck sh\*t covered campsite in Braemar (that was the only negative of the site) and the weather was wonderful all weekend. I have always tried to do at least one Scottish race every year. I sadly learnt early this day that my closest uncle (William) had passed away and this gave me the extra incentive and determination to run this race in his memory.

Race day had perfect conditions: warm, sunny and clear with a nice breeze on the tops making navigation reasonably straight forward. NFR had a team of three, myself, John Telfer and Lewis Grundy representing the purple and green. Starting at 2000ft at the Glenshee ski centre most of the ascents are in the 300 - 600 ft range with mixed terrain ranging from walkers paths/grassy trods/bog/heather and boulder field.

There is one exception to the climbs with an incredibly steep 1300ft after the only road crossing (where Wendy was on hand with refreshments) 14 miles into the race which brings you out onto some ski service roads which prove to be hard on the feet.

The views are never ending and it's an absolute joy to be out on such a wonderful day. To bag nine Munro's into the bargain in under 5 hours, none of which I can attempt to pronounce, makes for one of my most memorable races and a fantastic way to spend my 48<sup>th</sup> birthday.

And William - that was for you.

## Paul Appleby continued...

### Worst Fell Race - Old County Tops - 37m/10,000ft - 16.05.2015 - 10h 28m

This is a pairs event which I teamed up with my good friend and fellow NFR John Telfer who had completed this event on 3 or 4 occasions with a different partner each time; so no pressure and understandably some apprehension was in the air. I felt ok leading up to this event but on the day I was feeling considerably less than 100% before I had even reached Grasmere and the first real climb onto the Helvellyn range, so knew I was in for a tough day ahead. Here John D & Emma B caught and passed us and we never encountered them again all day. We dropped down to the first checkpoint at Swirls car park and thought some food would get me going, but unlike me, I could not eat as usual.

With John's encouragement we ploughed on up the long gradual climb to Scafell Pike and I was still unable to eat much, not talking much and feeling pretty lousy. We dropped off S.P and crossed the bogs to Cockley Beck checkpoint where John had told me about the lovely egg sandwiches – alas I could not stomach them and one big climb to Conistone Old Man still to do.

Somehow John coaxed me along the out and back to C.O.M, grim as it was, before dropping down around Blea Tarn where Kevin & Linda Bray had refreshments; a cup of tea was all I could manage before the drop down to finish at The New Dungeon Ghyll. Without John this would most definitely have been a DNF, and never have I been as glad to get to the finish albeit feeling and looking dreadful. I was unable to eat anything and drink very little for the rest of the day. I could not keep warm and while John, Kevin & Linda enjoyed the Golden Rule establishment in the evening, I was tucked up in our b&b trying to keep myself warm and feeling a little despondent. Thankfully by morning I was feeling much better and ready for breakfast.

This has to be the hardest t-shirt I have ever earned and maybe one day I will re-visit for another go. John – many thanks for getting me round and next time I will be better company.



Old County Tops with John Telfer

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Paul flanked by John Telfer and Lewis Grundy  
at the Glenshee 9