

## Hodgson Relay remembered

I first ran The Hodgson in 2003. I was new to the club and knew nothing about it. Dexter rang me up asking for volunteers. I had a blank diary, so said "yes". In those days the relay started at Sykeside camp site at Brothers Water. David Armstrong (Dexter) and Dave Atkinson ran the longest leg over Fairfield and St Sunday Crag - it was beautiful weather with blue skies and little wind. John Humble and Pete Scott ran the short leg 2 via Angle Tarn to Hartsop. Paul Hainsworth and John Dallinson ran leg 3 over High Street. Mike Jeffrey and I were waiting at Kirkstone for the final leg over Red Screes and Dove Crag to the finish at Sykeside.

Back then, internet access was limited. With no online maps/course descriptions, Mike & I only collected the map on the day and neither of us knew the route. The early morning clear skies had disappeared, to be replaced by cloud and drizzle. Inov-8s hadn't been invented and Walsh's didn't fit me. So I ran leg 4 in trail shoes and spent most of the time trying to keep up with Mike's rapidly disappearing fell-shoes. Mike had time to map read and took us safely round the leg - though I now know most of the racing lines eluded us.

I have since run the relay many times - running all the legs at some time apart from the High Street leg. The shortest leg (which is now leg 1) is a 45 minute blast around Angle Tarn where Jane Saul (former NFR stalwart) is usually marshalling. I once ran this leg with Dexter where his local knowledge of the route gained us a place or 2 despite the other teams being quicker than us.

Leg 2 is one of the longer legs and requires good route finding skills. The key checkpoint is a small tarn on the featureless Caudale Moor. Scott Gibson was our expert until recently on this. He has since handed over the baton to Roger Sillito who is now our leg 2 banker. If you miss the tarn, you can spend a merry time running around in the mist wondering why you hadn't bothered to recce the leg.

Leg 3 is the one I have run the most. You can take a direct route up a rather dodgy gully on Red Screes (which David Johnson & Steph Scott have both justifiably complained about in the past). But the safer route is to head up the path, before taking an indistinct line to Scandale Pass and around Dove Crag. There is a lovely grassy run into Dovedale, before it deteriorates into a rough and rocky descent.

I have only run leg 4 once. Adam Malloy and I ran it at short notice a couple of years ago. With no time to recce, we took the safe direct line off Fairfield over the top of Cofa Pike. Mark Clarkson is the person to ask for the best line as he has run the leg numerous times recently for the club.

When I look back at the relays over the years, 2 in particular stand out. The first is 2016. I ran leg 3 with Frank Shillitoe. It was a beautiful day, I knew the racing lines, and we were well matched. We ran as best we could, and it was the fastest time I have ever recorded on the leg.

The second was last year's relay. We had left Newcastle in pouring rain, but arrived to find the skies clearing in Patterdale. The team ran to its full potential. Katherine Davis and Richard Garland did leg 1. Roger Sillito & Matthew Briggs ran a barn-storming leg 2, surprising us all by how early they

arrived at Kirkstone. Dexter & I took over for leg 3. Both of us knew the leg well and we had a solid run. Mark Clarkson and Matt Hetherington anchored us over leg 4. NFR finished 25th overall - a very respectable position given that the cream of fellrunning is represented at The Hodgson.

The relay was founded by the Hodgson family in memory of a family member who died young in a road accident. It is a not-for-profit event and donates surplus funds to the local community in Patterdale. Amidst the trauma of the Covid-19 pandemic, this now seems particularly appropriate.

The Hodgson must be one of the best days in the fellrunning calendar. It's one to add to your CV if you get the chance.

John Duff - as seen below in 2003

