



The newsletter of Northumberland Fell Runners

**AUTUMN
2006**

Welcome to the autumn edition of your favourite local fellrunning newsletter. This edition has articles galore from Steve Birkinshaw, David Armstrong, Paul Hainsworth, Paul Creighton, and Will Horsley. Indeed, they have all done such a good job that the editor has had to restrict the contents of the newsletter. Yet more articles are available on the NFR website. There you can read about David Atkinson's successful Tour du Mont Blanc, Steve Birkinshaw's brilliant solo Charlie Ramsay Round, and Old Cheviot's reports of championship races.



**Aengus McCullough and Francis Blunt
at the FRA relays.**

Jeff Ross's BG

Jeff Ross successfully completed the Bob Graham Round on 22/23 July this year. He ran the route anti-clockwise in a time of 22 hours 7 minutes with support from numerous NFR folk. Jeff has written a detailed account of the day. Unfortunately his computer is not compatible with the editor's, so it is not possible to publish the account in full. The editor will be happy to post a copy of Jeff's account on request, but in the meantime here are edited highlights.

My first attempt at the BG was in 1999. It was probably the worst weekend the Lake District had suffered for rain, wind, and mist. I succumbed to the weather near Great Gable and retreated to the pub. There I was told Joss Naylor had called off a run – I was in good company! This was never going to be the end of the matter. It was me against the BG...

...At 7 am on Sat 22 July at the Moot Hall I was off again. This time hopes were high as well as the temperatures. The climb up Robinson was steady, Hindscarf and Dale Head were reached without incident, and the descent to Honister was taken easy. I was 4 minutes up on schedule...

...The climb up Grey Knotts was led out by Mike Jeffrey at a steady pace. The conditions were great for a scree run off Great Gable. We climbed over Kirk Fell to Pillar where we were afforded superb views over Ennerdale...

...We took the traverse under Stirrup Crag to Yewbarrow arriving 15 minutes up. I led the way on the tricky descent down a trod and scree that I had discovered on a recce...

...It was now the hottest part of the day in Wasdale with temperatures reaching 28C. The support team had set up in the shade of the trees which was very welcome...

...Bob Sewell led the way as we slowly made our way up Scafell. The heat was exhausting, but we still made another 8 minutes on the climb, reaching the top 25 minutes up. It was now off to Scafell Pike which is the highest point of the route. Bob commented that it was all down hill from there. I suppose it is best to have optimists with you on the BG...

...We climbed up Esk Pike then followed the trod from Ore Gap to Bowfell. I led the descent towards Rossett Pike down a series of ramps to the north of Bowfell Butress...

...I was glad to reach the flat grassy run beyond Harrison Stickle and we were soon off towards Thunacar Knott and High Raise...

...We traversed high above the worst of the ferns across boulders, then took a direct line down Steel Fell to the waiting support team at Dunmail. The steep climb of Fairfield was my worst moment of the round. We bagged Dollywagon 36 mins up, my confidence grew, and the summits came thick and fast...

...After Threlkeld, up Halls Fell Ridge and I felt reasonably OK. At Great Calva we lost 10 mins but I wasn't concerned. On Skiddaw there was mist and rain, and we pushed on without stopping...

...I raced to the steps of the Moot Hall and touched them at 5.07 am. I had won the re-match.

LAMM - Inchnadamp - June 2006

Inchna-where? An inch or 5 above Ullapool on a ¼" map and at the head of Loch Assynt. As usual the Lowe Alpine Mountain Marathon location was only revealed on Thursday afternoon before the Friday evening arrival – an 8½ hour drive along average roads to some of the most northerly Munros. But what fantastic scenery and well worth the drive.

The mist was down much of the time but we saw enough of the scenery to appreciate the grandeur of the region. There was never more than fine drizzle and the midges weren't bad at all. Red deer (very fast up craggy 45 degree inclines) and birds of prey abounded.

The overnight camp was very special - on a sea loch at Glen-coul, not far from Britain's tallest waterfall (over 200m drop). Howling wind overnight brought down the latrine screens – permanently – dignity to the wind!

I was grateful that Jerry had the foresight to pitch his 800g "crisp packet" Sup Air tent behind a dry stone wall. At 1am when I braved the wind briefly and marvelled how light it was, I noticed that some poor tent occupants hadn't appreciated the loch was tidal until their feet were a foot into the sea.

Bens surmounted or shaved on the 'A' included Ben More Assynt, Beinn Leòid and Beinn Uidhe. What struck me about this year's 'A' was how runnable the terrain

was.

The only limiting factors were fitness, blisters through constant contouring on the same side, and one or two old injuries (to be expected with a combined age of 89 years).

As usual on the LAMM, the sun did shine – but only at 2pm on Sunday for the presentations. Numbers appeared down and apparently 100 pairs hadn't turned up – presumably the far north location and inauspicious forecast put them off. I picked up only one tick this year and so far haven't gone down with Lyme's disease, unlike one unfortunate expedition doctor. Read more at:

<http://www.lamm.co.uk/2006/LymesDisease.html>

NFR members spotted were:

A course

Aengus McCullough & Francis Blunt M 12th

Paul Hainsworth & Jeremy Sharp MV (89) 24th (2nd MV)

B course

Philip James & David Hicklenton M 46th

C course

George Crawford-Smith & Edward Watson MV (118) 93rd (7th MV)

Martin Stone and the course organisers, Andy Spenceley and Angela Mudge, are to be congratulated on a superlative event. My memory this year is pleasure rather than pain!

Paul Hainsworth

A recent e-mail exchange

Dear Old Cheviot, I recently read your article on non-competitive fell-running. Would that non-competitive fell runner be the same non-competitive fell runner who sneaked past me without a club vest on, wearing false beard sunglasses and cap, near Crinkle Crags on the Langdale Horseshoe this year? Non-competitive my a***!

Yours, Jed Steel

Old Cheviot replies: Dear Jed, rest assured that whilst you lost out at Langdale, your beer-drinking prowess remains second to none. Old Cheviot will be at the next championship race in non-competitive mood (unless he gets you in his sights half-way through the race).

NFR

The newsletter of
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FRA RELAYS

NFR entered 3 teams for the FRA Relays. The Men's Open Team excelled themselves finishing 7th overall. Here is an excerpt from an e-mail written by David Armstrong.

I would like to say a big thank you to all those involved in the FRA relays in Calder Valley this weekend. It showed great commitment from everyone to turn out 3 teams in what turned out to be a great event. Everyone endured early starts, late returns and varying degrees of logistical difficulty to achieve it. Thanks to you all.

But most of all thanks to Dave Atkinson who had a nightmare week holding it all together, getting very little sleep, running up an enormous phone bill, and juggling and re-juggling possible leg permutations when the personnel kept changing, to ensure we could keep the 3 teams. It would have been very easy against that background just to drop a team and enter 2 open ones instead of Vets' and Ladies' teams.

An admirable effort everyone. On the day it was all worthwhile. The Open team ran brilliantly to finish 7th overall out of 118 starting teams, with Nick Swinburn running the fastest time of the day on leg 4 (and also leg 1 as it happens, which was the same route in reverse). The ladies' team (NFR's first ever) performed well to finish 14th out of 24 ladies' teams. Things didn't go entirely to plan for the Vets' team, but you can't have everything! We finished 26th out of 30, and only just managed to hold off our ladies. It was a great day nevertheless.

Cheers everyone.

Dexter



Steph Scott emerges smiling from the mud on leg one.



Jane Grundy and Susan Davis return smiling from the navigation leg.



Matt Simms in determined mood on leg 4.



Nick Swinburn in full flow.

More photos available on the NFR website.

CHEVIOT 2000 - 17 JUNE 2006 - *Paul Creighton reports*

For those who don't know this event, it is run by the Northumbria Police for the past 15 years with growing numbers each year. The event comprises of teams of three from any armed service, emergency service and Police force across the country. Guest teams are also included. I must say it is one of the best organised and professional events I have ever had the pleasure of doing.

This year's event had 101 entries, probably less than normal due to the problems in the Middle East. It starts in the Harthope valley just outside of Wooler with teams starting in small groups at 5 min intervals to spread the field out.

The course is 26 miles, which has just been confirmed this year thanks to GPS technology. It starts with a slow pull over Scald Hill and then progresses to Cheviot, which this year was covered in mist that was a godsend as it rapidly cooled us down. Glen McWilliams and myself again managed to get in as a guest team from Riverside Holiday Park, Wooler. We entered as a team of two due to Kevin Atwell having to take it easy with his injuries.

When we reached Cheviot I had a bearing of 304, which took us to West Hill the next checkpoint. On reaching West Hill we then headed for Auchope Cairn, passing quite a few teams, which were finding it difficult to reach West Hill. Some asked for the path, to which I said "I am sorry to say it does not exist, just take the 2nd peat hag on the left and you should be okay".

At Auchope Glen could not resist stroking the Marshal's dog. The two young lady marshals commented "we wish we could get as much attention", but Glen was too engrossed in the dog asking if it was a silver back or something (he must be losing his touch).

After this you can stride out to cairns, then we put the legs on down and up to Windy Gyle passing quite a few on the way. After Windy Gyle there is a nice down hill to Uswayford where we met Bob Sewell and Linda Bray. (Bob was smiling as ever.) We didn't see much of Kevin Bray, just at the start and finish; his team only missing out on the vets prize by minutes.

From Usway we checked in at Kidland Forest edge, then Bloody Bush Edge, Cushat Law, High Bleakhope, Coldlaw Cairn, and then the slog up to Hedgehope. Finally we made our way down to Langley corner, then to the finish where you are welcomed with tea, and T Shirt.

We both felt tired but you get that really good feel-

ing, that you can see in all the other teams. The presentation at the night time is something to behold with the golden welly award going to a new marshal who couldn't find the checkpoint. Also they had Guinness extra cold which kept our moral up over the last section.

This is a brilliant and friendly event. If you get the chance as a guest team, or any other chance of tak-



**Glen McWilliams & Paul Creighton
high up in the Cheviots**

IAN HODGSON RELAY

The club again reached new heights in this year's event on 1st October. Last year we achieved a highest ever placing of 15th but this year we improved on that noticeably to finish 12th out of 62 teams with a very consistent team performance.

Francis Blunt & Aengus McCullough, who turned out despite carrying a heavy cold, both marked their debuts in the event with an excellent 12th place in leg 1.

Dave Atkinson and David Steel took over for leg 2 and finished 14th. Leg 3 paired Charlie Stead and Steve Birkinshaw who ran strongly to lift the placing to 11th as they handed over to David Armstrong & Mike Jeffrey for leg 4.

Perhaps we might just achieve that elusive top 10 finish next year?

David Armstrong

Photos are posted on the NFR website.

THE GRIBDALE GALLOP - 11 July 2006; 8 miles; 1,500 feet; Cat BM

This was a race that I hadn't heard of before, but it was its 10th running. It's one of Dave Parry's North Yorkshire Moors summer evening series. Having completed the Chevy Chase, the Saltwell Harriers Fell Race, the Beacon Hill Race and cycled to the Lakes over Hartside in the previous 10 days meant that it was probably not my most sensible decision to go. But I couldn't resist a new summer evening challenge! I think I was the only person there from North of the River Tyne and it wouldn't surprise me if I was the only one from North of the Wear too! Other than a few DFR runners most were from NYM and other Yorkshire based clubs.

Many of these North Yorkshire Moors races take in parts of other race routes and this is no exception. It starts and finishes at the Gribdale car park near Great Ayton. For those of you that have done the Gisborough Moors Race in April, that is the parking area that you pass through after dropping down from Captain Cook's Monument and out of which there is a bit of a nasty climb back onto the moors to head for Little Roseberry and Roseberry Topping.



approaching Captain Cook's Monument

In fact, other than visiting Guisborough, the race route is pretty much the Gisborough Moors Race in reverse! It starts up that track to Captain Cook's Monument, then turns left down the track that you come up on the "Moors" race, goes through the woods, passes the barrier at the end of the track, goes down the road section and then continues up and over the moors to The Hanging Stone. From that point there is a choice of route as long as you visit the summit of Roseberry Topping and then you drop back off it, up Little Roseberry and across the moor to the finish at the car park, with a nice fast final descent down the path or parallel with it through the bracken if you prefer.

The race was won by Andy Hilton of Acorn, who just missed the record. NYM "A" took the team prize from Acorn with NYM "B", "C" and "D" following behind!



Heading up Roseberry Topping.

I managed to rise up to 10th place at one point but my lack of local knowledge resulted in me taking a less than ideal route option to Roseberry Topping, costing me a few places. I managed to finish in 15th position out of 85. These races are quite fast over good tracks, with only moderate amounts of climbing, and towards the end I have to admit that the exertions of the previous 10 days were taking their toll. Nevertheless, it was an enjoyable race in typically friendly and informal style. Why not give it a go next year?

David Armstrong

Glendale Show Fell Race

6 miles, 1000 feet, 28th August

Thirty-eight runners from all over the region and beyond gathered at 2:15pm for the race. Nick Swinburn led from start to finish and took over 2 minutes off his own record, set last year, to win in 40:02mins. Next up was yours truly over 4 minutes back with a fairly constant stream of finishers coming in behind.

The race was well supported by NFR members including Jane Walker who ran and provided many excellent prizes courtesy of Northumbria Mountain Sports, Morpeth. The top two prizes were Falke gore-tex jackets which were 'raffled' after the race amongst all the male and female runners respectively.

The race is organised by NFR's Glen McWilliams and is fully marked and marshalled which is greatly appreciated by the navigationally challenged such as myself.

Make a date for your diary next year for this race, always run on the August bank holiday Monday at Glendale Show, Wooler.

Will Horsley

The Weasdale Horseshoe - 8 Miles; 2,000 feet; Cat AM; 19 Aug 2006

The race turned into a bit of a North East "invasion", with several Tynedale Harriers competing in addition to the dozen or so NFR runners. This boosted the entries significantly with the North East warriors making up close to one-third of the 54 starters.

One Tynedale foot-soldier reported an early brush with the locals as he followed the signs for the sheepdog trials...

"I'm here for the fell race, is this the right place?"

"Na, lad; it's owa thear"

"Where do you mean?"

"Owa thear; owa that wall thear next t'tent"

"How do I get over there?"

"Tha's here for't fell race lad and tha can't even find tha way t'start...!!"

Much guffaws could be heard from farmers all around as Neil Cassidy sheepishly (sorry about the pun folks!) drove off to find the main show.

Historically this race was known for many years as the Green Bell Fell Race, although it is not entirely clear whether the route was the same. It is very much the race you would get if you could cross-breed the The Falstone Falcon Race with the Windy Gyle Race (possibly to be known as "*The Windy Falcon*"?) I say this because it is based at a show very like Falstone; a small and compact local agricultural show based around sheep, sheep-dog trials, home produce and the fell race; and a route which is very grassy and runnable terrain, like Windy Gyle. The hills all looked very grey and uninviting with mist on the tops on what was a pretty cool day. At least the temperature was good for running.

the route

The race starts with a fast downhill field, a sharp right-hand gate into the road and then a mile of so of flattish fields and tracks before the climbing starts. It's a tussocky and relatively gradual climb up to the first checkpoint on Hooksey, although only Paul Brittleton, setting a cracking pace, managed to run it all. From there a sharp descent is followed by an even sharper ascent up to Randygill Top, up which Paul could be seen still running and extending his lead, pursued determinedly by Will Horsley in 2nd place, returning to form after an injury lay-off.

That 2nd checkpoint is about the halfway mark and the last of the real climbing. A nice descent into a shoulder is followed by a gradual climb up a track to the 3rd and final checkpoint on Green Bell.

into the mist

Unfortunately I'd lost Will ahead and had to stop in the mist to take a bearing to decide whether the route followed the track diagonally across the hill or went up the steeper hillside on our left. I glanced across left and spotted Will, hands on hips, looking rather lost in the mist and shouted him over. This

cost me 20 seconds or so but must have cost Will around a minute, as he must have been around 30 secs ahead of me at checkpoint 2. Still, we were now back on route, even if our dithering had allowed the chasing group to catch us up.

Leaving checkpoint 3 in the mist necessitated another bearing check to ensure that the obvious track was in fact taking us the right way. This cost a few more seconds but at least then gave us the confidence to open up on the lovely long gradual descent.

Paul Brittleton was out of sight in the lead as we exited the mist and Will and I held our positions until about 300 yards from the end. A Helm Hill runner passed me just before the finishing field and then Will out-sprinted me over the last 25 yards to take 3rd place. Oh for his 20-year younger legs! We were both quite satisfied and in the absence of the mist there is little doubt that Will would have taken a comfortable 2nd position and me probably 3rd. But that's fell racing and the advantage of local knowledge!

the results?

NFR produced some pleasing performances. Will in 3rd place, I 2nd V40 in 4th, Ray Gray 1st V60 and Joe Garbarino 2nd V60 are particular results that I recall. I seem also to recall Susan Davis also running well, and finishing not far behind Geoff in his comeback race. But that's about as much as I can remember! And for some reason the results of this race appear to be a more closely guarded secret than the recipe for Coca Cola, so the results of the remaining NFR runners will forever remain a mystery! Don't worry though, Geoff Davis assures me that he took accurate mental notes for the Club Championships.

It was good to see Jane Saul and Lucy Donnelly returning to action, as they have been notable absentees from races over the last couple of years. Lucy can justifiably blame giving birth to Morag and moving to Cumbria but I didn't quite manage to catch Jane's excuse! Tynedale's Rachel Vincent continued her excellent 2006 form to win comfortably the ladies' race in a time of 1.13.33, just 13 seconds outside the course record. All in all it could be considered a successful North-East invasion!

The race is scheduled as an English Championships race for 2007 and so that would be an ideal opportunity for those members that couldn't compete this year to sample an enjoyable and very manageable race.

David Armstrong

Ingleborough Fell Race – 15 July 2006 – 7 miles; 2,000 feet; Cat AM

Based in the picturesque Dales village of Ingleton this was a lovely location on what must have been one of the loveliest days of the summer. In fact a beautiful day for just about anything except fell racing! The heat really was overpowering. The sensible ones lurked in the shade until the last possible moment.

There were 8 NFR runners, 6 men and 2 ladies, out of a field of 202, in what for most of us was a new race forming part of the 2006 Club Championships.



The NFR male contingent.

L-R Paul Hainsworth, John Dallinson, John Duff, Mike Jeffrey, Dave Atkinson, David Armstrong

Ingleborough is one of the peaks in the famous Yorkshire Three Peaks Race, a 24 miles classic each April. But this 7-mile race approaches the hill from the other side, up what is known as the main "tourist track".

The route starts and finishes in the Ingleton Show Field and is essentially an "out and back" course, other than a circuit of the pretty village on the way out and the very top section being a slight loop to keep descending runners away from ascending ones. After around ½ mile of road, the next 2 miles or so follow a firm hogging track of very light stone, between two high dry stone walls.

This light surface reflected the sun's intense heat and caused an oven effect between the walls that increased the running temperatures even further. At least the good track meant that they could easily transport water supplies to the end of it, which was a very welcome sight, both on the way up and on the way back. The last mile or so is a steeper and rougher grass and rock track to the top with the route then being reversed on the return leg.

The heat was really taking its toll as we headed back down the track. Mike Jeffrey had turned 15 metres ahead of me and opened up about 200 metres on

the early part of the descent. I could see him up ahead throughout and began to sense that I was gradually closing the gap. It was a major decision to go for it as it was becoming pretty unpleasant, and to take the comfort zone to the finish was very tempting. But my competitive streak prevailed and once I'd caught him it turned into a rather painful head-to-head race over the final couple of miles, where the gap never exceeded a couple of strides until the final 200 yards or so and at the finish was only a tiny 10-second margin.



One of John Duff's female admirers risks life and limb to welcome him home

All our runners in the men's race finished comfortably in the top half, with John Dallinson finishing a very creditable 4th V50. Sally Welsh also ran well to finish 4th LV35.

Overall results were:-

1.	D Kay		48.07
2.	M Croasdale	V40	48.39
19.	G Schofield	V50	54.41
35.	David Armstrong	V40	57.54
36.	Mike Jeffrey	V40	58.04
39.	L Lacon	Lady	58.36
61.	Dave Atkinson	V40	62.25
72.	John Duff		65.20
83.	Paul Hainsworth	V40	66.30
95.	John Dallinson	V50	67.50
143.	Sally Welsh	LV35	76.36
183.	Valerie Atkinson	LV35	85.34

David Armstrong

NFR RUNNERS TACKLE SWISS MOUNTAINS

The last weekend in September saw three globe-trotting members of NFR head for Europe to take part in the 2006 World Masters Mountain Running Championships, which were held this year in the Valais region of Switzerland.

The trip was inspired by the 2005 event in Keswick, and thanks must go to Joy Ryall of Tynedale Harriers for promoting the trip so actively to ensure that it happened. The "NFR Three" were Jane Saul, my wife Pam, and me. Joy kindly arranged around a dozen Tynedale Harriers to accompany us especially to cheer on their NFR friends!

The event is organised by the World Mountain Running Association and included more than 800 runners from 23 countries across the world, including athletes from as far afield as New Zealand, USA and Venezuela, and teams from virtually every European nation, including each of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Many familiar fell-running clubs and faces took part, including CFR, Horwich, DFR, Keswick, Mercia, Staffs Moorland, Carnethy and of course Tynedale Harriers.

The Championships are divided into 5-year age categories from Over 35 to Over 75, throughout the Saturday, with an Open Category race on the Sunday. Last year's event in Keswick was an exception to the normal format; in Mountain Running events the course is traditionally "uphill only", and this year followed that format, with the race taking place over a well-established World Trophy course known as the "Le Course de Deux Bains". A literal translation would be "the course of two baths" or perhaps "the Two Baths Race". Could it have been the inspiration for Scotland's own "Two Breweries Race" I wonder?

The route was 9.7km (6 miles) and involved total ascent of 1,054 metres (3,460 feet). This included, what for some runners was a welcome respite from uphill running, and for others was an even greater challenge, of crossing "Le Passerelle a Farinet", a 150 metre long, 1 metre wide, suspension bridge across a 250 metre deep alpine gorge.



**Le Passerelle a Farinet
or "that bridge!"**

The underfoot conditions were much more runnable than a typical UK fell race. It started on the road for around 1k and then progressed onto tracks, through vineyards, wood-

land trails, a couple more short road sections, grassy hillsides and even a tartan track for the last 300 metres to the finish. Because I knew underfoot conditions would be generally good, I had privately set myself the personal challenge of trying to run the whole route.

Competing in the Men's V45 race, I finished 31st in a time of 63.11. It was won by Andy Wilton of Mercia in 51.11. It took some gritted teeth at times, but I did manage to run all the way. Although whether this proved any quicker than I would have managed if I'd interspersed the running with some brisk walking is open to debate, because last year I was 28th at the Keswick event! Nevertheless, with 104 runners in my category I was never going to win the race, and at least it gave me a bit extra personal satisfaction.



**Pam: that's 3,300 feet sorted,
just 160 to go....**

In the Ladies Event, Jane Saul finished 36th in the LV40 category in a time of 101.29, and in the LV45 race Pam finished 29th in 95.32.

Notable performances from other Brits were Keswick's Dave Spedding, 3rd in the V60 race, and in the V50s Dave Neill of Staffs Moorland narrowly beaten into 2nd place by only 3 seconds by an athlete from New Zealand.

So why the Two Baths Race? The name is taken from the villages of Saillon, where the race starts, and Ovronnaz, where it ends, both of which have wonderful natural open air thermal spa baths. After the races the baths at Saillon provided welcome relaxation for tired muscles, and gave the runners, and their supporters, the opportunity to re-live the races by gazing wistfully over the mountains at the route (and *that* bridge!) whilst lying in the hot bubbles, as the alpine sun set. Heavenly.

Next year's event is to be held at Bludenz in Austria. If the last two years are anything to go by it will be a great event and well worth a long-weekend treat.

STEVE BIRKINSHAW'S

The Paddy Buckley Round is the 3rd of the big Rounds. Having completed the Bob Graham last year and the Charlie Ramsay earlier in the summer, I would not be happy until I had completed the Paddy Buckley. I was not doing much at the end of August so I thought it was a possibility to do it then. I thought I would have the endurance left from the Ramsay Round training and not have the speed to do anything else well. I decided the Borrowdale Fell Race would be a good test to see if I had recovered sufficiently from the Ramsay Round, and if that felt good I would have a go at the Paddy Buckley. I felt awful at the Borrowdale, I gave up and was ill for the next couple of days. But I decided to do the Paddy Buckley anyway!

I thought I would do a fully supported round this time and luckily there were not many other races happening over the August Bank holiday weekend and everyone I asked seemed happy to help. My sister and brother in law (Karen and Dan Parker) said they would come over for the day to help. Helene Diamantidies and Jonny Whitaker offered to come down for the weekend to support me and Tim and Jayne Lloyd offered their house (near Llanberis) as a base. Tim would act as road support and he would find some local runners to help. I did not really know any of the route and having local runners to help was a great bonus.

RECORD ATTEMPT

The next question was what sort of schedule to set. From my previous Rounds I reckoned with the support I had lined up around 18 – 19 hours would be realistic. The record is 18:10 so I thought why not set a schedule for 18 hours and see how it goes. I was not sure if I could do that time and certain things were against me. If I could do 18 hours I would have 3 hours of darkness (which would probably add around 15-20 to the time compared with the record which was completed entirely in daylight), any extra time would mean more darkness and slower times.

As well as the darkness the previous 3 weeks had been very wet in North Wales. The bogs were wet and the bracken and grasses were at their slowest; not good on a route that takes in a lot of untracked terrain. But I was prepared to risk setting off fast in the hope of seeing how close I could get to the record. On previous Rounds I had wasted over 40 minutes sitting down between sections; this time I was determined to reduce this to 10 minutes and thus immediately save half an hour.

READY FOR THE OFF

So at 5:30 I was standing in Llanberis ready to set off. I had James McQueen and Tim Higginbottom supporting me. James' navigation up through the quarries and along the whole of the section was per-

fect. I would recommend him as the perfect person to follow on the Peris Horseshoe Fell Race. Tim had just come back from a summer in the Alps and was exceptionally strong. When daylight came it did not seem to make much difference as the mist made for very low visibility. James and Tim kept telling me about all the nice views that you can normally see.

As well as the continuous drizzle there were a few heavy showers but I was very happy. My biggest fear is overheating and that did not seem likely. I had been over the Glyders once before but never up Tryfan and I had heard so much about it and how rocky it is. The wet rocks certainly made it quite a slow climb and descent. We arrived at the support vehicle 10 minutes behind schedule but I quickly grabbed a drink and a banana and carried on. Jonny took over from James and we continued over the Carneddts at a decent speed. I was drinking and eating well and felt fine. So when we arrived in Capel Curig although I was 20 minutes down on schedule, I was not too bothered. I had scheduled a time of just 5 hours to do these sections; the timings became much more generous after that and I could easily catch it up if I was going well.

A BAD SPELL

I had 5 supporters on the next section. I have always laughed about people doing these Rounds with lots of support but here I was with 5 people. However, it was really nice to have Karen, Dan, Steve Barnard, Colin Urmston and Dewi Williams. My legs felt heavy going along the short road section and then climbing up Moel Siabod it all started to go wrong. I seemed to have no strength in my legs; I was climbing really slowly. You always go through bad spells on these long Rounds and I was hoping that this was the case here. So I ate as much as I could, but I was not confident that it would help.

It seemed to be a lack of strength in the legs rather than tiredness. The support team were looking worried and I could see they were wondering why I was going so slowly. Eventually we reached the top; as soon as we started to go downhill I was going a decent speed. On the rocky sections I was even getting away from most of the support team, which cheered me up considerably, but I was still climbing slowly.

This section of the Round takes in a number of small little tops. With the low cloud and poor visibility these seemed even more arbitrary but Dan with his excellent navigation and Steve with his local knowledge had no problem finding each one. However, the heather, tussocks and deep bogs made this section really energy-sapping. The support team were trying to find good lines but sometimes they would go waist deep into a bog. At least I then knew were

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to avoid. Eventually we reached the Rhosydd quarries. Steve, Colin and Dewi went down and I was joined by Adam Haynes and Helene. Adam lives and works a few miles from these hills so knows them really well.

SPIRITS LIFTED

With the weather finally clearing my spirits lifted and I enjoyed the next bit over the MoelWyns and Cnicht. However, when we got down to Aberglaslyn I was now one hour behind schedule. I had been working really hard over the previous section and had still lost time, I knew the record was out of my reach and I was quite depressed. Not only was the record out of reach but I had another 8-9 hours of hard work to go actually to finish the round.

I struggled badly climbing Moel Hebog. The bottom section was deep grass and bracken and every step seemed hard work. I was now using walking poles which took some of the effort off my tired legs, but these were probably more of a help psychologically than in reality. I was meant to be doing this section with Helene and Adam but Helene had gone on ahead to Aberglaslyn and gone the wrong way. When we eventually met up on Moel Hebog her story of going wrong, flagging down a car and getting into the back with a prettily dressed girl whilst wearing my smelly thermal top cheered me up.

EVERYTHING STARTS TO HURT

At this stage in the round everything starts to hurt but it still seems such a long way to go. It is very hard mentally and I was wondering why I was doing it and why I wanted to put myself through such pain. At times I felt like crying. Adam and Helene kept talking and encouraging me and got me through my dark points. Eventually we were descending to Pont Caer Gors and the final section. The midges got me going again very quickly and I was soon trudging up towards Snowdon with Jonny (he was suffering from sore shins from the earlier section but still agreed to support me on this leg).

It was now dark and with another 5 hours to go but I was suddenly a lot happier, we were on the final major climb. I was going to finish this round; it was just a matter of plodding onwards. The mist had come in again but Jonny was careful with the navigation in the tricky conditions and made sure we made no big mistakes. Coming off Snowdon I started to feel really sick, if I had eaten or drunk anything I was pretty sure I would have thrown it back up. Luckily there were only a few little climbs left. Jayne, Dei Huws and Matt Gilbert joined us for the last three tops and I actually enjoyed the run down Moel Elio in Llanberis. I finished at 1.57am after 20 hours 27 minutes. I had completed the 3rd of the big three rounds and join the select group of around 15 people to have done that and in one of

the fastest cumulative times. However, in the back of my mind I was disappointed not to have got close to the record when I have the potential to do it.

ON REFLECTION

It is now 10 days since I completed the Round. Strangely I feel very different to the previous Rounds. This time I have felt light headed and feverish but the legs do not seem too tired. Previous times I have had no strength in my legs but I have had a clear head. I am very happy to have completed the round and although there were many times whilst out that I was not enjoying it, the sense of achievement outweighs all those negatives.

I did not break the record or even come close. However, in retrospect I probably could not have expected to break the record. To do that everything needs to go perfectly. That is perfect weather, no darkness, good underfoot conditions, and feeling right on the day. I did not really have any of that. The one thing I did have was a great support team and I would like to thank them for getting me round. In particular to Tim who provided all the road support, sorted out most of my other support and looked after me at his house before and after the Round.

I would also like to thanks Inov8 for the Mudclaws 330 one pair of which I used on the entire route. They had great grip and felt as comfortable finishing as they did at the start. A final thanks to Emma and our children James and Matthew for letting me go and do the Round. They had a good time in Liverpool being looked after by Emma's sister and her husband even if James did keep on saying "I not want Dada to go for a long run".



Steve, pictured on his successful Charlie Ramsay Round.

Full account on the NFR website.