



The newsletter of Northumberland Fell Runners

**SUMMER
2006**

Welcome to the summer edition of your favourite Northumberland newsletter which has news and views from several Club members. Your regular correspondent David Armstrong has written a couple of pieces; Will Horsley brings you news from the Isle of Man; and Paul Appleby reports on the Northumberland 100. Also Rob Stephens makes his NFR writing debut and has provided several excellent photos. And there's much more. Thanks are due to all those who have contributed articles and photos.

We are now midway through the championship series, with several notable races on the horizon. Coming up are Ingleborough, Borrowdale, and the Three Shires.

So we look forward to seeing you on the fells.

NEWS IN BRIEF

- **Will Horsley** – has maintained his fine form. Following victory at Brough Law, he has also won the Mudclaw Race (formerly Chapel Top Fell Race) and the Doctor's Gate Fell Race.
- **Charlie Stead** – has represented NFR well at the English Championship races, scoring points at the Anniversary Waltz and Lordstones races.
- **Francis Blunt** – is running well, finishing 6th at Helvellyn and 9th at Duddon.



As seen on the Everest Marathon - read Edward Watson's account in this newsletter.



Jeff Ross leads the field at the Alwinton Fell Race on the climb up Clennell Street

BOB GRAHAM ATTEMPT

Jeff Ross is attempting the BG on Saturday 22nd July. He has several supporters and pacers already, but a few more wouldn't go amiss. So if you are interested in supporting Jeff, have a word with him at a fellrace or contact him via the e-group.

OLD COUNTY TOPS

NFR retained the team trophy at the Old County Tops race this year. This classic race takes in the high points of the Old Counties of Westmorland (Helvellyn), Cumberland (Scafell Pike), and Lancashire (Coniston Old Man). There's the small matter of 37 miles and 10,000 ft of climbing as well.

Jerry Sharp and Dave Atkinson were first team home for NFR. Mike Jeffrey and David Steel were second in, and John Duff and Jane Grundy were third counters.

The weather was grim for much of the race, but gradually improved towards the end to give fine views for the final leg over Coniston.

Pictured below are NFR with the team prize – a fine slate trophy



Subscriptions!

Most of you have been very forthcoming and have generously paid your 2006 subs without me having to move forward to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th stages of our collection procedures:

2 A personal reminder.

3 The release of an official list of those tight-fisted members who are too mean to pay.

4 Sending the boys round with a four-foot length of tubing from a drinks bladder and a selection of long and specially sharpened walking poles – ouch!

So far we have 73 paid-up members compared to 90 in 2005 and so there are a definitely a few of you that are yet to cough up. I'm sure you are just forgetful.

But remember, ***you cannot qualify for the Club Championship if you haven't paid your subs*** and it's no good running to me cap-in-hand in November when you see that you are in with a chance of a prize because the "paid-up" list will already have been sent to the Championship co-ordinators!

So if you think that you may be one of the stragglers, please check your cheque book stubs and send your £10 to the address opposite (cheques payable to NFR please) a.s.a.p. It's not worth paying the £2 levy now as the return has already gone in. Using the official renewal form (available on the website) would be preferable (but not essential) as that helps me ensure that your contact details are up to date. As a last resort, I have a record of those that have paid up if you have no other means of checking. But if you could check yourself first it would be preferable, as getting 30 or so people asking me to check the records can be a bit of a chore - and I'd much rather be out for a run!

Cheers,

David Armstrong

Your Man at Alwinton writes

Sun, wind, and a dry course greeted the 29 runners at the Alwinton Fell Race. After the initial drag up Clennell Street, it was good to be out on the open fell and climbing up to Bloodybush Edge. The usual peat bogs had almost vanished on the run to Cushat Law, but the stiff headwind meant it was a long, grinding climb. After a fast descent through Kidland Forest, there was a final sting-in-the tail climb up the aptly named Racks, before a whizz to the finish in Alwinton.

Jeff Ross fared best in the hot conditions, leading from the off and claiming a maiden fell race victory – congratulations Jeff. All his Bob Graham training is clearly bearing fruit. He was followed home by Garry Owens (5th) and Mike Jeffrey (7th) who claimed the men's team prize for NFR. In the V50 class, John Humble held off John Dallinson, possibly aided by the latter having run the Blaydon Race last night. Ken Ralinson was first V60, despite not having his bus-pass in his bum-bag.

In the ladies' race, Rachel Vincent from Tynedale was a clear winner. She was pursued by Karen Robertson until Karen took the wrong line off Cushat Law, allowing Alison Raw DFR to sneak through for second. Sally Welsh was a creditable second V40. As YMAA left, Kath Dallinson was doggedly working her way round the race. She had done the Blaydon Race the night before, and been up Cheviot twice during the week. Come on NFR, Kath's training regime is putting you to shame.

Fashion aficionados will be interested to learn that there was lots of smart headgear on show – caps and buffs. But the fashion prize goes to Mike Jeffrey who ran the whole race in knee-length tailored shorts. Mike claims he left his running shorts at home by mistake, but fashion-istas suspect otherwise.

NFR

The newsletter of
Northumberland Fell Runners

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The Carlton Challenge - 25 April 2006 (4.8 miles; 860feet)

I don't normally enter many North Yorkshire Moors races as, living in Haydon Bridge, it somehow appears sacrilege when I can reach The Lakes just as quickly and easily. But working in Durham City gave me a convenient start for an evening race and so the chance of pushing for points in the Club Championships on a nice spring evening seemed too good to miss.

I'd never heard of this race before and had no real idea where it was, but once I was past Stokesley, I just used well-proven race tactics and followed other vehicles driven by slim and fit looking characters until I reached the car park!

HIGH START

Unusually, the race starts and finishes quite high up. The evening was dry and bright and consequently the terrain was firm and dry. The first half was a mixture of flat sections and gradual descent on narrow firm tracks, with the whole of the climbing coming in the second half, up the Cleveland Way, much of which was paved with erosion-preventing stone. The only real fell-type descent comes from the last checkpoint to the finish. So it was perhaps not a race for the purist fell runner, but was very fast course, runnable all the way, and an enjoyable and well supported event.

Dave Parry announced at the start that there are in fact four different route choice descents to the finish and so no one would be considered finished unless they touched the gate where he would be standing at the end. He was right too, with people arriving thick and fast from all angles and through crowds of others that had already finished! How he managed to keep control of it I'll never know. At one point someone even came in from the other side of the gate behind him.

But in typical Dave Parry style, despite the potential mayhem, everything ran very smoothly and was enhanced by his relaxed attitude and wonderful sense of humour. One can only marvel at how much of his time he gives up for the promotion and organisation of North Yorkshire Moors fell running. The man is a legend.

NICK WINS AGAIN

Nick Swinburn stormed to another victory, helped in no small measure by the speed enhancing qualities of his newly acquired NFR vest. Take note anyone who doesn't already have one. Nick's time was only 4 seconds outside the course record, and given that he ran in a knee bandage and appeared to have a bit of a limp at the end, I suspect on another day he could have claimed the record. Charlie Stead also ran strongly finishing 5th.

Altogether around a dozen NFR members took part

(but only one lady) and I would say that an enjoyable evening was had by all.

Dave seemed quite certain that NFR had won the team prize with 1st, 5th, 11th and 14th places but felt obliged to actually perform a count, which unfortunately resulted in a club called Acorn beating us by 2 points. Shame, as is always nice to launch a raid on Teesside and steal the spoils from DFR and NYM! Still, we managed to beat the two local teams and gained a case of beer as 2nd team as a small consolation. Cheers!

David Armstrong

KIELDER BORDERER

Just like to say for everyone else's benefit that this is a great race - it's in my top four favourites now - along with Windy Gyle, the Mountain Trial and the Phoenix. The route goes through fantastic wild country and represents what Northumberland fell running is all about. I saw three deer and some goats I think. My route choice was terrible and I swam through heather and bog for miles but I know the 'way' for next year. It would be a shame if it stopped. **David Steel**

John Humble and Louise Wilkinson very kindly helped a group of half a dozen of us pathetic lost souls over to the escarpment path & Knox Knowe. But then the competitive spirit really set in and the two pathfinders dropped back just below Knox Knowe (even led us astray methinks) and whilst our group of 6 had committed ourselves to bounding down the waist-high heather deep into the cleugh, they (I'm pretty sure) doubled back to find the elusive track over Haggie Knowe. So whilst we were battling through a heather jungle, lower down, each of us taking a comical tumble at some point or other, I could spy Louise way up ahead just about to approach the Kielder Stone.

Rob Stephens



John Humble at The Borderer

JUNIOR SECTION by Karen & Iain Robertson

Controversy at the High Riggs Junior Fell Races

Sunday 21st May 2006 saw High Riggs, St John in the Vale which was the second counter in this years English Junior Fell Championships, with several of our younger members making their fell running debut, all in the under 8's category.

Finlay Robertson looked smart toeing the start line in his full NFR kit, while Millie Robertson and Jessica Scott (both aged 5) wore their best going out gear and were closely supported throughout the race by their Mums.

The weather was proving ideal for what was a tough 0.5 mile course, undulating around race headquarters. The run began with a sprint for the older children and a steadier pace for the younger ones. Fin found himself in third place but when the pace settled he soon progressed to second, tucking in behind a big lad from Cumberland Fell Runners.

They ran like this all of the way to the finish. However, drama ensued only 10 feet from the finish line when the CFR runner suddenly stopped. Fin continued crossing the line first. He was congratulated at the line as 1st and given a huge bar of Galaxy chocolate by the race official. However, Fin's win was overturned as it was discovered that Fin's number had been crossed off the finishing list with the CFR lad's number replacing it in first. Fin although disappointed by this decision did not protest but continued to eat the Galaxy in case they wanted it back.

Meanwhile, Millie and Jessica showed fantastic teamwork and determination to run the whole distance together. They crossed the line holding hands and had clearly enjoyed the whole experience from the size of their smiles. They were both rewarded with Maltesers for the effort they had put in. Well done girls.

Unfortunately, we had no other representation in the other age groups, except for Nick Swinburn (who forgot his vest – luckily the kit woman was at hand to save the day). Sorry Nick, we couldn't stay to see how you got on. Come on you older kids - get those Walshes on!

Editor's Note:

Other youngsters have been in action at junior fell races. At Alwinton, the junior race was won by Ben Jeffrey and his sister Polly was third. Ellen Welsh separated the siblings finishing second. Ben wore a fetching Newcastle United top, whereas the girls opted for Morpeth Harriers colours.

Garburn Trail Races

The weather proved kind for this 20k race over the Garburn Pass from Staverley to Windermere. Karen Robertson was the only NFR entrant in the senior race and she did the club proud, finishing a very respectable 5th in a very classy field. At the finish looking tired but pleased she said, "tough for a trail race...."

Keeping it in the family, Finlay Robertson, took part in the U8's race which was the third counter in the Junior English Champs. The course could be described as an undulating 0.5 mile course, which was over multiple surfaces.

Fin was straight into the lead at the gun. He showed great determination but was pipped on the line by his nemesis from CFR, (see High Riggs report). Fin is loving the races and looks great in his NFR gear.

Fin would like some company on the race scene so to wet the appetite of some of the younger members, here are a few races of note:

- 20th Aug – Pendle, nr Burnley (English champs)
- 26th Aug – Bellingham Show or Dufton Show
- 2nd Sept – Lads Leap, Peaks (English champs)
- 23rd Sept – Thievely Pike, nr Burnley (English champs)

Further details available at:



Fin Robertson leads the way for NFR at Garburn.

REFLECTIONS ON THE EVEREST MARATHON 2005

Even now, some two months after my return from Nepal, I find it difficult to prioritise the various aspects of the Everest Marathon. It was a very intense experience, with lots of adrenalin used up.

Before I set off, I had the following goals:-

1) To complete the Marathon in whatever time it took. I long ago realised that I would never run another sub three hour marathon and merely to finish could be a worthy target.

For the record, I completed the 26.2 miles from Everest Base Camp (at about 17,500 ft) to Namche Bazaar (at about 12,500 ft) in 9 hours, 24 minutes.

2) To climb both Gokyo Ri (18,200 ft) and Kala Patar (18,600 ft) would be the second and third highest points I had ever reached. In 1980 I traversed the Tesi Lapcha Pass (19,100 ft) from the Rowaling Hirnal into the Khumbu.

Still, these ascents would show there was still some life left in this old dog.

3) To raise a considerable sum for Diane's Everest Marathon Fund. When my application was accepted all those months ago, I originally decided not to raise anything for any charity. On reflection, however, I felt I was wrong. I have visited Nepal twice

before and have been amazed by the cheerful, smiling encouragement that I have received from all I have met. I, therefore, threw myself into fund raising and everybody on both my personal and business "Christmas Card List" received a begging letter. I have been surprised and touched by the generous support of my friends.

Well, needless to say, I achieved all my goals but my sense of fulfilment has amazed me and I consider myself privileged to have had the opportunity to revisit Nepal amongst a whole hearted and friendly bunch, who gave and received support whenever it was needed.

The mountains and the scenery were vast. It is impossible to describe the grandeur of the scenery from Kala Patar towards Everest, Lhotse and Nuptse over the Khumba Glacier in either words or photographs. Many have tried but the only way that one can experience this grandeur is to climb Kala Patar yourself – every slow, plodding footstep to its summit.

The pull of this country, its people, its mountains is so strong that I know I will return sooner, rather than later.

Edward Watson



Two Riggs - 6.5 miles; 1,350 feet

Let me say first of all that this is a wonderful evening fell race. It's well organised, very accessible, and situated in St John's in the Vale near Keswick. It's a beautiful location on a Spring evening and a lovely route. Only not this year!

We left Northumberland in pleasant hazy Spring-evening sunshine, but could see the blackness out West. By the time we reached the M6 it was teeming down and as black as you could ever see.

Enthusiasm was somewhat on the wane as we headed towards Keswick. Although at one point someone commented "I think it's brightening up", and they may have been right as at that stage, I was able to switch the windscreen wipers from maximum speed to normal and could just about see the road. If I had £5 for every time I was to hear those words over the remainder of the night I'd be a very wealthy man. What an optimistic bunch fell runners are.

The NFR contingent was Stewart Beaty, John Humble, me and Dave McFartpants, who spent most of the evening telling anyone who would listen, and several who wouldn't, that a fellow NFR runner had been disqualified from the Buttermere Sailbeck two weeks earlier for not having a map of the route.

We were joined in our car by an infiltrator in Tynedale's Marcus Byron, which was handy because everyone was so disorganised that it was like "Swap Shop", as maps, compasses, whistles and safety pins were freely bartered.

Marcus was luckily able to provide John with an industrial size Mothercare nappy pin that could fasten his number to his whole vest in a single action. However I doubt that it will catch on, as John was convinced this considerable extra weight had contributed significantly to Marcus beating him. So if a Tynedale Harriers runner ever offers you safety pins, politely decline.

After parking in the field at Bram Crag Farm, incidentally the home of the brother of the great Kenny Stuart, we sat in the car plucking up courage to run to the registration barn. On the call of "I think it's brightening up" we dived out and slithered over. Pinned to the door we were greeted with the weather forecast. On the summit it was +2 degrees, with gale force winds producing wind-chill of -11. And this was 24 May!

There was a remarkable turnout of 129 sodden runners, boosted by the race being a counter in both the CFR and Ambleside Club Championships. Out of those 129, there must have been around 80 that

started wearing their upper body cover and a further 20 or so in full body cover. The remainder must have been fooled by the oft-heard calls of "I think it's

brightening

up".



Plodging along the Riggs.

The route heads south from Bram Crag alongside a wall for a mile or so and then crosses the road and passes through the car park near Sticks Pass, climbs up onto the Riggs as it heads Northwards, crossing High Rigg to the turn at Low Rigg. This is followed by a fast home run south again across 3 or 4 flat fields back to the farm, to be greeted by a nice warm barn with sandwiches, cakes and copious amounts of lovely hot tea.

Given the conditions, somehow survival seemed the order of the day, with the race being somewhat secondary, but for the record, I finished 18th, McFartpants excelled himself to finish 23rd, John was 76th and Stewart, who races very infrequently these days, was 125th.



McFartpants and his mates.

So no prizes for anyone, although Neil Cassidy from Tynedale Harriers flew the North East flag taking 2nd V50 after an excellent run in a high quality field.

It was one of those fell-racing nights that will live long in the memory. But be warned, such severe conditions can take their toll, as John Humble was last heard mumbling incoherently

that he was taking the following day off work to run solo round the Kielder Borderer for the 86th time. Utter madness.

David Armstrong

Editor's note - McFartpants is aka Dave McPartlan.

LONG DISTANCE LOVE

Anyone who can recall my performances in long or even medium distance fell races in 2005 will be very surprised to hear that by May this year I had tackled two 30+ milers.

The first was the Haworth hobble, also known as the Wuthering Hike. I was one of five NFR members to turn up on the day; the others being Jane Grundy (a veteran of several hobbles), Garry Owens, Peter Reed, and Graham Wilkinson who were all using it as training for their Northumberland 100 attempt.

This early March race was 31 miles long with approximately 4500 feet of ascent and was run over the grit-stone moors around Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire. (Bronte country, as every signpost is keen to point out). Despite the rich terrain available I was disappointed that the race made use of so much tarmac. The race attracted a large entry this year as it was the first in the newly organised Ultra Distance Championship sponsored by Montane.

The ascent was well spread out over the route and the climbing was not particularly arduous except perhaps at around the 18 mile mark where there was a sharp climb over moorland to Stoodley Pike. Despite some threatening bad weather, the cold and the snow held off until most of the competitors had finished, which allowed for a very enjoyable and scenic "run" (hobble, as it happens, turned out to be a very good name for the event).

Out of 191 finishing times (estimate 250+ individual competitors as many were in pairs) Garry was 23rd, comfortably under the 5 hour mark. I was 30th and ecstatic that I had exorcised my long-distance jinx by just nicking in under the 5 hour mark. Jane was 6th female and 4th solo female in 5h 45. Peter and Graham took their time by stopping for every refreshment offered (including hotdogs!) and came in at about 6h 20 and approximately half way down the field. The winner set a new record in 3h46 with a 30 minute lead over 2nd place.

I had been using the hobble as a training run myself – I needed to get some confidence at that distance and try some kit for the Manx Mountain Marathon at Easter. This race has been run in various guises and with several route variations since 1970. The current course covers the length of the island from Ramsey in the north to beautiful Port Erin in the south and runs the course of the mountainous spine of the island. It is 31.5 miles long with nearly 9000 feet of ascent.

I was very apprehensive about this race and my only aim was to finish it. I started well and "ran my own race" oblivious to who was overtaking me and who I

was overtaking. At just over the half way point in St Johns, which is more or less right in the middle of the island, we encountered the Manx Half-marathon runners. I made it through about 20 minutes before their start and was surprised I didn't see more of them later.

Ninety competitors started the MMM but only 81 finished (that's a 10% drop-out rate!). On the day the weather was near perfect – a slight headwind, sunny, dry, and just a little chilly. Things warmed up later and the heat and sun probably accounted for most of the nine that didn't finish. The course is 99.9% off-road and takes in just about every bit of fell-running terrain there is: peat bog, wet bog (waist deep!), dry stone paths, wet mud, coniferous forest, gorse, heather etc. One particularly cruel marked diversion was through a field of gorse – the only option being to grimace and get through as fast as you can.

During the second half of the race I was really tiring and jogged a few sections however I knew by this point that I would finish and probably do quite well. I had saved a couple of dextrose gel sachets for the last few miles and I felt like Popeye the sailor man ripping the top off the sachet and squirting it down my throat as he does with his tins of spinach. They had a similar effect too as my legs felt as light as a feather and I took three places and made the third fastest finish of the day to finish 8th overall in 5h 33. I was immensely happy with this result.

The race is really well organised with dibbers at various checkpoints providing a print-out of your performance over the course, and lots of locals cheer you on at every crossing and village. The winner completed a hat-trick of consecutive victories in 4h 54. I was the only NFR member doing it this year, but Ken Maynard of DFR was also there flying the flag for the North East. This race comes highly recommended – I hope to do it again in 2007.

Roll on the Chevy Chase!



FAIRFIELD HORSESHOE – *Rob Stephens reports*

the run up

A month before the race, my good lady Pat and I set off up Nab Scar on a combined recce and recovery walk after the previous day's Hawkshead Trail race. Despite being avid fell-walkers and having lived in Cumbria for many years, we're still taken aback by just how big some of these mountains are! The Lake District can be stunningly beautiful and the Fairfield Horseshoe is a classic circuit offering some especially cracking views on the descent.

The recce was worth it for a number of reasons: not least to suss out the 'tricky section' that I'd heard about south of Low Pike, but also because I now knew what to expect and was all the more excited about doing the race. So imagine my dismay when, two days later, muscles still tight from Hawkshead, my calf tore. It looked like Fairfield was off.

But after plenty of rest and painful massage (self-inflicted), mixed with some gentle walking, I eventually managed one proper, if a little tentative, run a week before the race was due. So, Fairfield Horseshoe, my first ever fell race in the Lakes ... bring it on!

race day: the up bit ...

With regard to running, common sense says not to try anything new on race day ... so why then, as we scale the rough eastern slope of Nab Scar, am I hunched over, hands clutching thighs, nose 18" off the ground, in a limb-synchronised scuttle, something I've never really tried before? ... Well, because the local boys and girls do it and it seems to work!

Using this method, I actually seem to speed up for a while as I pass Paul Hainsworth and I murmur something to him about this weird fell-dancing technique. But the advantage is short-lived: straightening up, Paul steams past again as I try to muster up a basic running gait.

Now, up in the cloud, the field seems to thin out even more. A girl up ahead takes what looks like a nasty tumble on the rocky path, but seems OK: a reminder of how treacherous wet, lichen-covered slate can be. Smiling marshalls at Great Rigg and at the summit of Fairfield are shrouded in cloud and looking very cold ... hats off to them, I say ... or should that be hats on!

... and the down bit

Turning for home, I'm glad the main climb is over and I'm also glad I wore my Helly, as the wind whips up from Deepdale, cutting right through. Along the tops and downhill is where the fun starts: speeding up and quickening footwork over the rocky sections, but unfortunately this doesn't go quite to plan as getting up here has really drained me and, to be honest, I could do with a sit down!

But I catch up with some of those who left me for dead earlier ... *woah!*, the rocks get bigger and slipperier and everybody's arms are flailing about, looking for balance: I bump into one runner and nearly take a nasty fall too. It's a real thrill, though, to be running so fast with others over this ridiculously rough terrain.

Now, the best part: after Dove Crag, the rocks disappear under soft tussocky mat-grass and the stride can really lengthen. Dropping out of the cloud, breath-taking views emerge, looking up Windermere. It's difficult to judge forward lean here because there's a long way to go yet and it's almost relentlessly downhill.

Now, this is where the recce comes in handy: the path forks to take you to the nasty drop-off (Sweden Crag), which is shorter. It's straightforward enough getting down, but seeing lots of folk heading that way, I anticipate a bottle-neck and veer off to the left on the safer, unimpeded but longer route. Judging by my subsequent position when the alternative paths rejoin, I can say that one way is definitely quicker than the other ... that's all I'm saying!

Nearly there, the smooth grassy slopes before Low Sweden Bridge are just asking to be run full pelt, so I try not to disappoint. I spot Geoff ahead, first NFR I've seen for ages, and put pedal to the floor as I say hello. After those long strides, I feel almost disembowelled at the bottom of the slope. Just a last bit of track back to the finish, but it's seemingly endless: a few good folk cheer and some refreshed front runners with that 'job done' look on their faces amble back to their cars, whilst I struggle to remain upright and try to keep those knees up.

Through a cooling beck in the beautiful grounds of Rydal Hall just before the last clamber up to finish. Geoff right behind me. Well, there were plenty in front of me and plenty behind, but I didn't mind. My calf behaved itself, I had a weekend's camping in the Lakes out of it and it was a real joy to run such a great Cumbrian race.

Impeccable race organisation and thanks to them all for a great day out.

Karen Robertson, who finished third lady overall, crosses the stream near the



NORTHUMBERLAND 100

The time we had all been waiting for had finally arrived, the weeks and months of training; recceing and thinking about the 100 would with any luck be over in a day and a half or so. Looking around the Glendale Middle School Yard as the 470 or so entrants prepared themselves for the start of the Northumberland 100, you couldn't help but notice many hardy looking characters of a certain age (even Peter Reed said he felt quite young!).

THE MAGNIFICENT 7

So at 10 am the magnificent 7 set off (Peter Reed, Bob Sewell, Allon Welsh, Graham Wilkinson, Jane Walker, Stevie Matthews and myself) at a steady walking pace and made our way up through Wooler, up Common Road where Gary Owens (on bicycle due to injury) gave us encouragement, and we joined the St. Cuthbert's Way. We walked steadily chatting and looking forward to what lay ahead, when after only 2 or 3 miles Jane said she could feel a blister. She took off her new shoes to reveal a big blister on her heel; blister pad on, but not a good start for Jane. We reached Hethpool at 12.15 and were amazed at the choice and quantity of food and drink available from steak pie (3 pieces for Graham), pasties, sausage rolls, cakes and biscuits.

Refuelled we climbed steadily to rejoin the SCW, descended to Halter Burn and up the road to Town Yetholm checkpoint. Fed and watered again we set off along road up Crookedshaws Hill and Wideopen Hill (pac-lites now on as we encounter our only shower on the route but only for half an hour) to eventually reach Morebattle about 1.5 hrs up on a 34 hr schedule. Bob was now devouring huge quantities of food and was well ahead on getting his money's worth.

UP DERE STREET

From here to Towford Outdoor Centre was the longest between checkpoints (9.7m) and we set off at a brisk walking pace through the hamlet of Otterburn and the long drag up to Dere Street, then a nice steady run down to Towford checkpoint for more refuelling: this time soup, ravioli, sandwiches, cake, fruit, biscuits and gallons of tea. We were now up about 2 hrs on schedule.

We left the checkpoint to see Jane and Stevie in the distance coming down Dere Street and falling just a little behind. We set off on the long climb up Dere Street towards the Border Ridge contouring along the side of Gaisty Law along to Black Halls and the Pennine Way. The wind was quite strong and fairly cold and seemed to have been in our faces more than on our backs, then it was along to checkpoint 5, Yearning Saddle Refuge Hut. Quick drink and a mars bar then along the ridge to Windy Gyle and Scotchmans Ford. The light is fading rapidly now so quick stop and lovely run down to Barrowburn

checkpoint for 22.30. A good feed (4 hot dogs, 2 bowls of rice pudding and mandarins, 4 pieces of cake and 3 cups of tea). I was now level with Bob who was still full up.

SHILLHOPE LAW BY NIGHT

Head torches on and up the steep sometimes boggy climb to Shillhope Law, looking back to Windy Gyle to see a procession of winding head torches, an amazing and wonderful sight, everyone is still in good spirits and really enjoying the night. A steep descent to Shillmoor, over Usway Burn, up the steep climb of Pass Peth, and down to Alwinton, checkpoint 8. A change of socks and shoes for Peter, Allon and Graeme, whose wife Ingrid eventually caught up with him, after going to Barrowburn, but ending up at Chew Green, never having been to Barrowburn before! One person retired at the checkpoint with a twisted ankle and a few people were treating blisters.

Now for a fair bit of tarmac and most people are walking, feeling tired and generally quieter but we try to keep a good walking pace going, passing The Peels, Well House, Charity Hall, Sharperton Edge, Trewhitt Moor to reach Low Trewhitt checkpoint. A cup of tea, more cake, and a sit down. Six miles to Rothbury and our thoughts turn to breakfast, let's hope it's the full works. A few more elite runners pass us as we approach Thropton, still running at a good pace after 55 miles or so, the first one passing us at Alwinton after making up 4 hours on our start time!

As we walk up The Keys bank and up Physic Lane, Graeme looked pale and said he felt unwell. "Let's get to Rothbury for some breakfast and see how you feel then", I said. As we drop down off the hillside, Wendy meets us at 04.45 and gets a few photos. A quick wash in the school, a change of clothes, socks and shoes, Bob treats his blisters and we are ready for breakfast. Ingrid tends to Graeme who is in a lot of pain and feeling sick. He felt that he couldn't go on and retires without breakfast, still a great effort having covered 61 miles. Peter is feeling his ankle but it has eased with more painkillers.

GREAT BREAKFAST

A great breakfast served by the Lancashire section of the LDWA, cereal, full English, toast and tea: they certainly know how to look after you. 05.35 and we set off along old railway line, down to Pauperhaugh, up through the fields to Healy and on to Hope Farm. More refreshments but Peter is concerned about his ankle which is swollen now and decides to retire especially with the Comrades 56 mile event in south Africa in 2 weeks time. Another fine effort from the NFR Vet 50 Champ (AKA my Dad!).

As we left Hope Farm we were met by Mike Jeffrey

Paul Appleby tells the tale

and Sally Welsh who continued with us to Wandysteard Farm checkpoint then on as far as Edlingham. Next checkpoint is Bolton Village Hall. The beans on toast and more rice pudding went down very well. Suddenly Jane appeared from nowhere, looking surprisingly fresh and quite cheerful, refuels and joins us as we left. She was still full of running and set off along the road with Bob, while Allon and myself could only muster a steady walk.

TIRED AND SORE

We pass through Shawdon Hall Farm, Titlington Mount Farm, through a plantation where we encountered a walker fast asleep. On shutting the gate he awoke and we asked if he is ok. He said that he couldn't stay awake and promptly fell back to sleep. As we approach Eglingham we caught up with Bob and Jane, but Allon started to feel very tired and both of my shins were really hurting now, time for more painkillers. Wendy and my sister Susan turned up at Eglingham and gave us encouragement and another change of socks.

This next section had a lot of narrow tracks through heather and is painful on our feet as everyone is feeling the effects of blisters. Allon stopped to treat his assisted by Jane, while Bob and myself walked on. We reached Quarry House and took a much-needed seat and refreshments.

We were all walking slower and slower. As we walked down the farm track towards Chatton, Bob

and Jane eased ahead. We reached Chatton and again had a bite to eat, but we didn't stay long. The end was in sight with only one more checkpoint to go and everyone just wanted to get finished.

ALMOST THERE

Allon looked very tired but was determined to carry on. All on the road now up to East Horton and Bob and Jane pressed on. Almost there only 3.6 miles to the finish from last checkpoint. Down the road to Weetwood Bridge, steeply up hill to fields where Mike and Sue Jeffrey, Sally Welsh and families gave encouragement and took photos. Finally the last descent was on a narrow path downhill through gorse and heather and the run along the road to the school.

Bob and Jane finished together in 32 hrs 59 mins; a fantastic effort and Jane became quite emotional. I was met by Wendy and Susan who accompanied me the last half-mile to the finish to complete in 33 hrs 8 mins. Allon dug in and finished in 34 hrs 12 mins. Stevie got back just after dark in 37hrs 12 mins, a great achievement for someone who doesn't run in the hills a lot. A bite to eat, a chat with other finishers, and collection of your certificate and t-shirt. What a fantastic way to spend a weekend, in the hills and countryside with friends and like-minded people.

Whit Weekend 2006 will be remembered for a long long time.



Graeme Wilkinson, Stevie Matthews, Jane Walker, Paul Appleby, Allon Welsh, Peter Reed and Bob Sewell at the start of the 100