

BEN VENUE – October 2, 2010 : 7.5 miles & 3,000 feet of ascent

Billy Fraser and myself took the high road into the Trossachs to test out our injured limbs at the Ben Venue (pronounced "Venoo" as in "Och aye the noo") hill race. Although in its second year, this was the first time the race had been run over the intended course, given that bad weather last year had forced a truncated route.

Friday night – Pre race training



Saturday – Ankle at the ready



Despite having done rigorous ankle and elbow bending exercises (by which you turn a beer fast into a beer fest) the previous evening there was more than a little trepidation as we were called into line just as the heavens opened and the race organizer merrily regaled us with tales of 30 mph winds and hailstones on the summit.

Around 70 other hardy souls set off in a torrential downpour along a minor road before turning into a forest after about 500 yards with the trees providing some semblance of protection from the elements.

Most of the next mile and a half was along forest tracks and roads and although pretty runnable I was overcome with a sense that the general direction of travel was upwards. Whilst all seemed fine in the ankle department the lack of any serious running in the past two and a half months meant that I was operating with sub-optimal lung capacity and had me wheezing and gasping for breathe.

Breaking cover out of the forest the race then turned to head straight up Ben Venue with a Trahenna like ascent with several false dawns along the way with the route hitting a plateau only to continuing its inexorable journey upwards. Despite the poor weather, there were still some good views to be had down to Loch Katrine and Loch Lomond and the lower slopes of the Arrochar Alps.

Although the rain had temporarily abated it was with a mixture of thanks and pity that I greeted the summit marshal huddled up against the elements, in stark contrast to my own near sunbathing like experience on top of Simonside a mere fortnight earlier.

My woeful pre-race reading of the map suggested that we were now in for a pleasant run along an airy ridge before descending back down into the forest. Wrong !!!! Although the route was vaguely ridge-like it took you through a mixture of shin slapping heather, slurry like peat hag and slippery rock (especially on the descents).

Saturday October 2, 2010 – 7.5 miles & 3,000 feet of ascent

The route also entailed a number of nasty little steep climbs. The longer the race went on the harder they seemed to be whether over rock or grass. Eventually, it was time to head down but at a gradient that meant the more timorous of us were prone to using the infamous "fifth point of contact". Unsurprisingly, believing it wiser to take an extra few minutes to negotiate such terrors rather than being heroic and risk another two months on the sidelines I managed to present quite a few overtaking opportunities to my fellow racers at this stage.

However, one individual who sped by seemed to be heading off at a 90-degree angle to everyone else. As I never saw him at the finish I cannot tell if he was taking a devilish cunning route or whether he is still roaming the Trossachs as we speak.



Fellrunning makes you grow
Before - Clean, full of vigour and 5ft 7 in

After - Dirty, weary but 6 ft 1 in

Billy informed me that quite a few others had gone adrift at various points which seemed a little odd as the map provided plus the presence of plenty marshals on the hill, copious amounts of tape and signs marked "Phil Sanderson this way" should have curbed the wilder challenges of route finding.

Back into the forest I summoned up all my waning resources and managed to overtake a Bellahouston lady, or should that be a "bella Bella"?, about a mile from the end before finishing in around 1 hour 50 minutes giving the race winner a 40 minute start on me in the very well supplied cake tent.