

## Ian Hodgson Mountain Relay - 7 October 2012

If ever you wanted to pick a perfect autumn day in Lakeland, this was surely it. A cool, crisp start (particularly for those that left home in the dark at 6.15am!) but lovely sunshine, and hardly a breath of wind all day. And to be there for one of the best fell-running competitions of the year too. What could possibly be better?

“The Hodgson” is widely regarded as probably the premier Club fell-running relay of the year. Being on difficult Lakeland terrain, and requiring 8 runners rather than the 6 needed for the annual FRA Relays, it provides a consistent and very challenging test for any Club, and is always over-subscribed as a result. This was the 25<sup>th</sup> running of the event. 68 teams of 8 are accepted, which include all of the top fell-running Clubs in England, and several from Scotland too.



*“The NFR Team of All Stars”*

*Back, L-R: Paul Hainsworth, George Nicholson, me, Mark Clarkson, Dave Atkinson, Louis Goffe. Front, L – R: Lee Bennett and ... John Tollitt??!!*

Mark Clarkson and George Nicholson led us off on leg 1, from Patterdale, over Angle Tarn and down to Hartsop. They ran well and finished in 24<sup>th</sup> position in 42.01. In fact they ran so well that they caught Dave Atkinson and me not quite ready! Due to a traffic jam hold-up into the car park of course, not our useless incompetence!!



*Mark & George on Leg 1*

Dave and I set off, somewhat flustered, with me still packing my bum bag as I ran, and we headed up around the Knott, and on to High Street summit. It's rather a long uphill stretch that! You're rewarded with some good open running across to the rocky ascent of Stoney Cove Pike, and again beyond to the tarn on Caudale Moor, and on down to Kirkstone Inn. We were fairly happy with our run of 1.23.19, but still slipped a few places overall to 28<sup>th</sup>, as we handed over at Kirkstone to Paul Hainsworth and John Tollitt, for the steepest ascent of the day up Red Screes.

John was making his debut in the event, but Paul has run it before, and had detailed knowledge of the leg 3 route over Red Screes and on to Dove Crag from his Joss Naylor Challenge reccies. They ran another consistent leg, in 1.09.32, but we slipped a few further places to 31<sup>st</sup>. We were still well in the top half of the field, and given that 4 of our 6 runners that had run so far, were aged 49 or over we were fairly happy with that. Especially with our secret weapons yet to go off on leg 4!

Louis, Lee and I extracted some local knowledge from leg 4 record holder, and former British Champion, Gavin Bland, as they waited to go off, and that cemented the recce information Louis had gleaned himself the previous week, so we had high hopes. This is the toughest leg, with 2,800

feet of ascent in 6.5 miles, over Hart Crag, Fairfield, Cofa Pike and St Sunday Crag.



*Louis & Lee descend to the finish on leg 4*

Our boys didn't disappoint, running strongly to bring the team home in 1.29.52 and lift us back up to 24<sup>th</sup> position overall. And top North East team once again! Well done everyone.

We all enjoyed a well-deserved locally-brewed ale in the warm sunshine at the finish, to slake the raging fell runners' thirst in the traditional manner (you should have been there, John D and John T!)



*The real "All Stars"!*

*L – R: Dave, Paul, me, Mark, John, George, Louis & Lee.*

As usual the event was won by the Borrowdale Open team ... for the nth time.

The relaxed atmosphere at the end was dampened somewhat by the breaking news that one of the leg 4 runners had suffered a suspected heart attack, and following CPR somewhere near the top of Fairfield, had been taken by helicopter to hospital in Barrow. Louis and Lee had passed the incident, as medical aid was being delivered, and understandably had found it a rather sobering experience.

Tragically, it has been confirmed this morning that Darren Holloway, aged only 42, and who I believe runs for Pennine Fell Runners, died from his condition. No doubt Darren would have spent the first part of that day, as we all had, marvelling at the beauty of the location, and thinking how lucky he was, to be there in the lakes, on such a gorgeous sunny day, taking part in one of the best events in our wonderful sport. There by the Grace of God ...

For such a day to end that way is so tragic, and with the cruel irony that it happened at an event that was itself created as a memorial to another keen fell-runner, Ian Hodgson, who also tragically died at a prematurely young age. I'm sure all our thoughts go out to Darren's family, his team mates and his friends, who must be so shocked and saddened by what has happened.

Oh, how vulnerable we all are, as those of us in NFR have sadly experienced ourselves.

*Dexter*