

**WADSWORTH TROG – 20 miles, 4,000 feet of ascent (if you get to the finish that is !!!!)
February 11, 2012**

Arriving in Hebden Bridge late on Thursday afternoon one thing soon became very clear to me, it was very, very cold. A walk up to Old Town that evening, from where the race starts, to meet up with my friend Geoff in The Hare and Hounds made something else very clear. Despite the general lack of snow the drizzle that was falling was immediately turning to ice – on the road, on walls and on vegetation. Whilst almost a wonder of physics it did not bode well for a race on some of the most exposed Pennine moors. Therefore, faced with a possible re-run of 2007's cancellation it seemed prudent not to let the hospitality elements of Hebden Bridge go to waste.

Roll forward to Friday morning, the promised snow had failed to materialize but it was still absolutely Baltic. John Duff was due across by lunchtime so I thought a bit of "clear the head" walking on the race route would not go amiss. By coincidence I bumped, or more accurately slid, into race organiser Hannah who was out seeing if we could actually race. We quickly agreed that the usual route at the start was too unsafe. Actually it wasn't unsafe it was sheet ice.

At this point it looked like the highlight of my trip might be an(other) evening in The Fox & Goose, no bad thing in itself. However, within an hour this resourceful young lady, partially aided and abetted by yours truly had found a safe route out onto the moor. A quick chat with the local farmer, over whose land we wanted to run, who was helpfulness personified despite questioning our sanity and we had at least half a race. A call from one of Hannah's cohorts elsewhere on the course confirmed that although icy the other main problem points could withstand the attention of some sensible fell runners – we had a full race, game on !!

Overcome with the euphoria that there was going to be a race I volunteered to go and flag the new part of the course. This was done full in the knowledge that Mr Duff would be along in an hour and could be my guinea pig to test my flagging skills. The main problem was trying to stick bamboo canes into Arctic tundra. Not easy but the task was eventually accomplished. Following a couple of hours of yomping over frozen moorlands John departed for his Youth Hostel in Haworth and I departed for the assorted hostelries of Hebden Bridge (too numerous to mention).

Saturday dawned clear and still but very cold. As we assembled at the start line there was barely an inch of exposed flesh on display. Apart from hat, gloves and buff I had three layers on top and two down below and more in reserve in my kit bag. Believe you me it was cold and little did I know how much I was going to be grateful for that in about two hours time.

As we ascended out of Old Town on the new "Telfer Route" (yes, I know I am milking this a bit) I was feeling good if not a little cold. Once out onto the moor it quickly became a game of avoiding the sheet ice. This usually comprised of

running, dancing, sliding or lunging from one side of a path to find some traction. Descents were being taken at a much more sedate pace and it was a true blessing when, on the first high moor, we ran into some snow which you could run over without feeling as though you were ballet dancing on marbles.



John "Gloves are for wimps" Duff leaving Checkpoint 3 (photo : Geoff Matthews)



Example of a fellrunning fashion disaster, usually just a fellrunning disaster (photo : Geoff Matthews)

It was certainly a day for concentration, but what a marvelous challenge and with a certain “we’re all in this together” camaraderie it was turning out to be a grand day. Jolly marshals and jelly babies added to the fun. The usual “bog from hell” at the charmingly named Top O’ Stairs was frozen over and with good visibility the cunning cut-off corner down to Top Withins (reputedly Emily Bronte’s inspiration for Wuthering Heights) was achieved without hardly breaking step.

With this checkpoint safely negotiated the challenge just racked up a scintilla or two. Usually this next stage of the race heralds a good fast descent over flagstones (a la the top of the Cheviot) down to the Walshaw Dean reservoirs. However, given the conditions the wise route was to run to the side in order to remain upright.

After a while the flagstones cease and it is just a case of following a well-defined path amongst the grass and heather. As I dared to give myself a little pat on the back for having dealt so well with these conditions (by my very limited standards) the frozen bog gremlins stuck out a leg and over I went. In the nano second I had to react I managed to throw out an arm such that I managed to land side on but nevertheless taking a bit of a thwack to knee and elbow. Saying a naughty word I dusted myself down and buoyed by the fact I had not ripped my new compression tights I continued merrily on my way.

However, in about 200 yards I saw someone lying across the path definitely not going merrily on his way. My instinctive thought was that it was a photographer looking for a clever angle for his picture. However, the grimace on the face of said individual soon made it pretty clear photography was not on his immediate agenda. Despite his protestations that although he had done something to his ankle but was probably going to be okay and that I just carry on I suggested he stand up in order to put his theory to the test. Having immediately crumpled into an anguished heap having followed my rather stupid advice I did not need all of the medical knowledge gleaned having done a degree in Business Studies and Accountancy 28 years ago to know that my brother fell runner had a bit of a problem that he was not just going to “run off”.

Because I am just so typically British the first key thing to do before assessing the strategy for dealing with this situation was to make formal introductions and so it came to pass that John from near Edinburgh came into the company of Chris from Heptonstall. We were soon joined by Johnny and Pete who between us, formed an impromptu rescue party assisted by ibuprofen and bandage carrying runners who followed on through, all offering unflinching support and sympathy. However, most importantly was their task to raise the alarm at the next manned checkpoint to send out the St Bernard’s.

In the absence of a Plan B it was quickly concluded that Plan A was to get Chris down to the road which served the Walshaw reservoirs. Given the conditions underfoot and the fact the path had inconveniently narrowed this

was not an easy task especially as Chris was around 6 foot plus and Johnny and myself were probably around 6 inches shorter. Chris was stoic to the last and buoyed by the concern of offers of help from those runners coming. Even in times of trouble a sense of humour is never far away. Consider this exchange.

1st Runner – “Can I help ? I am a doctor but not in this field

2nd Runner – “What are you then, a Doctor of Philosophy?”

1st Runner – No, cardiology

Member of Stretcher Party – “No, it’s okay we haven’t lost heart yet.”

Anyway to cut a long story short, the alarm was duly raised at the next checkpoint (by numerous folk) and after covering about a mile in just over 1.5 hours a wonderful lady by the name of Claire had arrived to pick us all up in her car which had done over 250 thousand miles. Therefore, it was safe to assume we would manage the next 5 back to the start.

Happily, Chris was dropped off in Heptonstall (where I understand his contribution to his wife’s preparation for a dinner party that evening may have been a little truncated) with nothing worse than a sprained ankle.

I arrived back at race HQ to formally declare my retiral from the race to be greeted by John who had stormed (and skated) round to finish 36th out of a field of around 140. Despite having only covered around 7 out of the 20 allotted miles I was still ready for the soup and cakes on offer at the finish.

Over tea and more cake John and I discussed the conditions and a modern day take on the parable of The Good Samaritan who had drunk too much the night before and probably saved himself from greater injury by going to someone else’s assistance.

Despite the unfortunate turn of events this was another grand day out, exceptionally well organized. It was cold enough running so how the marshals must have been feeling is anyone’s guess.

Roll on February 2013.

John Telfer