



RAB Mountain Marathon – 4th/5th October 2014

Once again, the RAB mountain marathon lived up to its reputation as the ‘friendly score’ mountain marathon. Having enjoyed racing at the RAB for the last two years I feel credit is due to Shane Ohly and his team at Ourea events for seamlessly taking over the helm and ensuring that the event ethos was upheld.

One of the highlights of this year’s RAB MM for me was covering new ground, which is a novelty having now competed at over 30 mountain marathons, especially for a race held in the Lakes. A short walk from the event HQ into Crookdale, south of Shap, saw Adam (my usual partner in crime) and I queuing at the start, giving us chance to eye up the competition and discuss our strategy:

With Adam still recovering from his efforts at the UTMB and this my first real test of the knee following a 3 month injury set back after the WHW race back in June, we had similarly reserved ambitions. I wanted to make sure my knee survived and to try and make best use of the 7 hours in the day. However, having been chosen as favourites alongside Stuart Bellamy in [Ian Corless’s race preview](#), the pressure was on and Adam and I both really wanted to improve on our 3rd place finish last year.

Our combined pack weights of <8kg would certainly help – our experience of going lightweight pretty much optimised thanks to a very favourable weather forecast!

We eventually set off and then marked up the map with some 400+ points worth of controls that were in play for the Day 1 Long Score– 7 minutes eaten away and no progress made! Our route out from the start was quickly agreed and had us heading out picking up some fairly technical controls over low lying tussocky moorland around ‘Borrowdale’. The clag stayed down long enough to make good Nav necessary and despite the lack of hill time my compass skills were not at all rusty. Without realising Adam and I caught and passed Stuart on a climb an hour into the day before spiking a tough control in the mist and shooting off the fell down into Long Sleddale.

The course planner Charlie Spronson did an excellent job, teasing us with some big scorers that were very spread out and committing. So, Adam and I duly committed, taking a loop south along Long Sleddale then north over the rough fells above Staveley then through Kentmere with the intent being to pick up some big pointers later in the day in the hills around Haweswater on the return to midcamp.

I struggled with cramp for a short period climbing out of Kentmere but managed to overcome it; the sustained early pace, a lack of water on the hills and the rough ground to blame. As was the case with most people we spoke to, the tough terrain – predominantly knee deep tussocks, heather and waist high bracken – meant that our strong early pace was at this point hindered and we had to reign in our plan for the last 2 hours dramatically.



After a slow slog directly up the side of Ill Bell onto the cloud free summits above Haweswater, we began our retreat towards the midcamp via the Kentmere horseshoe path. Whilst initially I was frustrated by the lack of choice of controls around midcamp, this actually meant that competitors had to make best use of the remaining 90mins or so. Big points were still available to the brave and indeed runners going much slower than Adam and I scored much more highly at the business end of the day. By heading straight towards midcamp by the 'path of least resistance' and not having confidence in our ability to beat the clock we limited our choice of controls. We finished with 20mins spare scoring 290 points and were pleasantly surprised to have finished the day 2nd, with Stuart Bellamy pipping us by 10 points having taken a completely different but equally committing loop to the north and having to scamper back to mid camp in a similar fashion to Adam and I!

Day 1 Stats: 39.0km with 2120m climb/descent in 6hrs39m

It was great to then unwind in the incredible setting at the end of the Long Sleddale valley, catching up with friends and talking amicably with our main competition, Richard Dearden (3rd Day 1) and Stuart regarding the diverse route choice and terrain. The continuing mild conditions and dry ground meant that we had a very comfortable midcamp and our experiment with the use of my homemade solid fuel stove was successful.

Setting off in the 1hr window on the morning of Day 2 makes for a relaxed start, but coincidentally setting off just a few minutes ahead of Stuart meant that if we were to win overall we would have to run hard, pull away from him and take in at least one more control worth 10 or 15 points in the 6 hour limit. Stuart just had to stay in touch, or, as the case ended up being, leave us to run our race and chose a more efficient higher scoring route!

After another quick map marking exercise Adam and I ran hard all day, powering up and down for a couple of controls north east of midcamp before heading south to again enjoying the mild weather and virgin terrain, which with its lush rolling hillsides reminded me of the Dales.



Adam and I climbing out of Long Sleddale on Day 2 – Photo courtesy of Ian Corless

Having suffered from the rough ground on Day 1, we agreed to clean up the central controls by taking a route to avoid as much of the open fell as possible. In hindsight this cost us with the three teams that beat us on Day 2 all taking a more efficient, shorter line over these controls which enabled them to pick up an additional 15point control on the climb back out of Sleddale.

Despite the route choice, our sustained pace meant that we caught up within sight of Stuart and then incorrectly convinced ourselves that we must now have points in hand. Stuart must have seen us and picked up the pace, with both of us racing the last hour hard to the finish but turning down a close call for a 10pointer on the run in, finishing comfortably with 17 minutes spare.

Day 2 Stats: 33.8km with 1740m climb/descent in 5hrs43m

So, despite running hard and feeling like we had improved our performance on day 2 we had to be satisfied with finishing 4th on Day 2, hanging on to our Day 1 position to finish 2nd overall behind a deserving winner, Stuart Bellamy.

We got stuck into our free veggie chilli and tea at the finish and again chatted amongst our friends and competitors in the buzz of the marquee. I always enjoy the prize giving at the RAB MM as generous prizes are awarded to top three teams and solo runners for all



categories, meaning that right through the field people's efforts over the weekend are rewarded (although it does take some time to get through everyone!).

Overall, mission accomplished. My knee survived, our pace and navigation was good and we improved on last year's 3rd place with some more valuable lessons learnt for executing score based races; to make use of ALL our time; to spend more time early on in the day masterplanning our route and look at more alternatives.

Thanks again to Shane and his team at Ourea Events for a fantastic weekend. See you next year!

...Now, what shall I treat my wife to, courtesy of RAB!?