

## **Rab Mountain Marathon – 26<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> Sep 2015 – North Wales**

This year's Rab Mountain Marathon was based in the lovely Snowdonia National Park around the Glyderau and Carneddau areas. This was only my 3<sup>rd</sup> MM event, having first dipped my toe at the 2013 Rab on the short score. This time I had opted for the Long score and to run as a solo. Unlike other MM events, the Rab has a simple two class option, a short score (6 hrs day 1 and 5 hrs day 2) and a long score (7 hours and 6 hours), which can be ran as a pair or a solo. I was both excited and apprehensive about spending to days running on my own. It was truly a learning experience.



The journey down on Friday evening was an interesting affair, for me at least. Gaining real insights into the dark arts of minimal kit carrying from the guru Andy Higgins. With talk of balloons, 'smash' and 'toddler sized' tents, one may have thought we were discussing a children's birthday party. Higgins was indeed dumbfounded by the concept of me carrying a sleeping bag weighing in at a mighty 1kg.

The start is a relaxed affair and competitors can start anytime they like within a 2 hour window. The weather for the whole weekend was spectacular and really created a lasting impression of a part of Wales I had only visited once before. The course planners had split the two days on either side of the main road to allow equal points to be gained from either approach, but with crossing points. At the start I collected my map and dropped to a knee to plan my route. I (for some unknown reason) decided to opt for an unorthodox approach of starting on the Glyderau side before heading over onto the Carneddau side. With 7 hours to play with the day went steady and worked well for me. Moving well over the ground I was happy with my progress. My route involved a couple of long steady climbs but points seemed to be collecting well. As the 7 hours came to a close I had to leave 2 checkpoints due to lack of time, and headed for the mid camp, flying down the last descent to come in with 55 seconds to spare! I ended day one in 12<sup>th</sup> position with 240 points, which I was well chuffed with. Clearly something had worked well. Higgins and MM partner Adam Stirk came in soon after having visited all controls on the Carneddau side, collecting 300 points. To there's and everyone else's surprise they were pipped to

day 1 glory by Neil Talbott who had collected 310 points. Craftily visiting one checkpoint on the opposite side. Higgins was baring all the signs of a hard day out in the hills... with a red raw back caused by some combination of tee shirt and bag rubbing. Having later looked this condition up, I discovered it is called 'lightbagitis' and is often caused by running with a bag which is too light! I suffered no such ailment! And so following some grub, rest, and chat we headed off to bed. Me to my spacious tent, with warm ground mat, and cosy sleeping bag. Higgins to his toddler tent (shared with Adam) and his balloon party.



Day 2 was a continuation of the great weather and during the night the camp was 'apparently' blessed with a great Moon. Something Higgins had been admiring while outside stretching at 2am..? Very odd behaviour. At the start, the day 2 control list was collected and the route planning started again. I was conscious that a good day 2 could even see me feature in a top 10 finish. On hindsight I was a little brash and decided a route pretty quickly then set off. Day 2 seemed to be going fairly well and navigation was



good. By half way through the day I was beginning to feel pretty tired and a key moment arrived, though at the time I did not appreciate the severity of a bad call. What I failed to do was re-evaluate my route. Given my fatigue, time lapsed, and more crucially distance left to cover to the finish I should have changed tact and headed more towards the finish area. However I ploughed on upwards over to 3 checkpoints on the south side of the Glyderau. Perhaps alarm bells should have been ringing when everyone I could see was heading past me in the other direction! Following a nightmare ordeal of trying to find checkpoint 16, which used up around 30 mins, and having not actually found it, I finally checked the map distance to finish. I had less than 1 hour remaining, and over 10 k or mountainous terrain to cover, including 400 meters of ascent. S\*\*t! I carried on and watched the minutes tick away. 6 hours came and went, as did the 30 minute lateness cut off after which 0 points are awarded. I continued on for a further 45 mins before arriving at the finish. A total of 1 hour 15 minutes late. 0 points achieved from day 2. S\*\*t! I was absolutely spent. Arriving in a finish, when Shane Ohly (event organiser) already knows your name, it is either a very good thing, or a bad thing. In this case the latter. I was dead last on the day 2 long score, 109<sup>th</sup> out of 109. And to make matters worse, Higgins and company had demolished all the post race Chilli meal. Great!



It took an hour or so to pull myself together and the 5 hours journey back to Newcastle helped with the post-race evaluation. Perhaps it was that cosy sleeping bag, or were those bloody balloons the hidden secret... I think it was in fact just a case of being overly ambitious and failing to re-assess at a key point. I later discovered that Andy and Adam had reached a similar key point and opted to descend (like everyone else) and miss off the couple of checkpoint I headed to. That's experience. Andy and Adam had a good day 2 and having bagged a late 10 pointer from the Carneddau side finished on 215 points with a total of 515. This earned them a 1<sup>st</sup> place finish. Well done guys, heroic effort. I ended up 65<sup>th</sup> overall.

A great event, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Back next year for sure. Bring on the OMM...!

Mark Clarkson