

Three Shires Fell Race – by John Duff

I last ran the Three Shires Fell Race 15 years ago – according to the NFR website archives. I've been meaning to return ever since. The race on Saturday 17th September took place in near perfect conditions – blues skies and a cooling northerly breeze. The race take place at the meeting of the 3 old shires of Westmorland, Cumbria and Lancashire – hence its name.

A large field of 250 runners assembled in Little Langdale. The start was delayed by 5 minutes as we waited for the last few runners to emerge from the portaloos – finally they appeared and with a cheer we were off.

After a mad dash down the road and across the beck, we were soon into the first climb up Wetherlam. This is a very steep affair with various lines available through the bracken – all of which seemed hard-going. The climb scores a bulls-eye on the summit, from where there is a rather rocky descent to Prison Band and the climb up to Swirl How.

The descent takes a contouring line around Great Carrs. I knew the route here from the Old County Tops earlier in the year and picked up the pace. But plans for a flying descent down Wet Side Edge were abruptly halted when I took a tumble and banged my knee. I hobbled on down to Wrynose Pass, losing a few places in the process.

After passing 3 Shires Stone, I got my head down for the climb up Pike O'Blisco. A gel got me going and my knee pain was abating, so it wasn't long before runners started to appear on the short out-and-back to the summit. Leigh Warburton (Bowland) was just ahead of me. He's run more Lakeland Classics than most folk. Sure enough, he knew a great line off the top and we were soon hammering down to Blea Tarn.

After crossing the road, the final climb up Lingmoor is short but steep. I pushed on and managed to overtake quite a few runners. In fact, when I reached the top I couldn't see any runners ahead of me. The marshal pointed me in the right direction, and I set off on the grassy trod.

I had forgotten how long the ridge of Lingmoor went on. Initially I felt great, then I worried that I should have dropped off the ridge sooner as the route wasn't flagged yet, and then I just felt tired. But when I reached the fell-gate, the flags appeared and I spotted runners ahead. I made a last effort for the final section through the fields before the welcoming sight of The Three Shires Inn and the finish hove into view. I crossed the line in 2 hours 36 minutes. I wasn't quite in a "Borrowdale" state ie collapsing over the line and taking an age to recover, but I knew I'd run hard.

Not long after me, Darren Fishwick finished. It turned out he'd been suffering from a cold and had backed off on the last climb. He's run over 1,100 races and hasn't DNF-ed yet. Well done to him. For those who follow his musings in The Fellrunner, his next article is on the way. Apparently this one involves a tale of the bowels of Fleetwith Pike – I can't wait.

The race was won by Jack Wright (Ambleside). This was a popular win as he is son of the race organiser Selwyn Wright. Harry Bolton (Keswick) was second, breaking up the Ambleside team dominance. Ben Abdelnoor (Ambleside) had a storming run to finish 4th overall and 1st V40. He was hopeful that this would cement his place in the forthcoming relay teams. But don't worry if you miss out Ben, I can always put a word in for you at NFR.

A pint of appropriately names Langdale Bitter in the Three Shires Inn after the race rounded off a great day. Many thanks to Selwyn Wright and his team from Ambleside for an excellent race.



my race mug from 2007