

COSMIC COMIC



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THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS

by Mel Edwards

Part 2. The Hill Running Years

In the December 1997 issue of the Cosmic Comic I detailed at length my background in running before I became obsessed with hills and mountains, and hopefully readers will find this article more in tune with their love of hill running.

There is no doubt that running in the hills and mountains has a certain magic quality...something natural compared to the more stereotyped road running and track running, and although I have now reverted to track, road and country (there are reasons for that) I am certain I will never experience again the (albeit ephemeral) sense of natural splendour I encountered on the high tops during the Maidens of Mamore race on a glorious summer's day in 1976. .

Back to late 1969 (before many of you were born!). I never cease to be amazed at the human body's qualities of recovery. To think that for many months back then I was a running cripple in my late 20's, yet at 54 years of age last winter I finished the New York Marathon, my first for 28 years. NEVER GIVE UP until you hear the nails going into your coffin, and even then make sure you have your Athletics Weekly, a torch, and a copious supply of batteries.

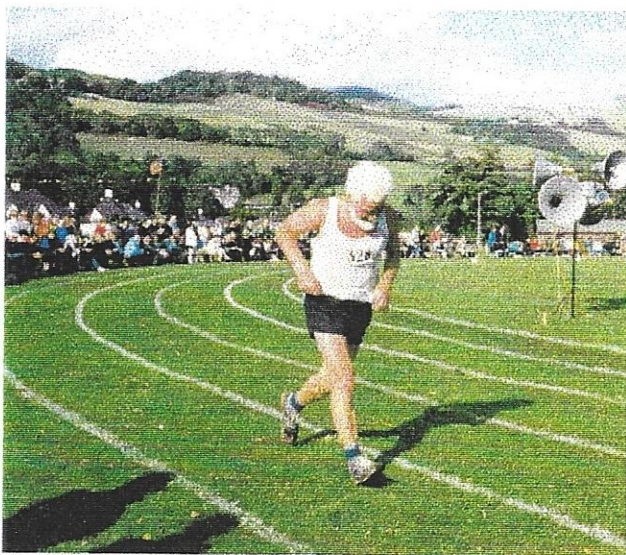
I will not dwell long on those nightmare days. I had a right leg which was not painful but, quite simply, would not work properly. Whether it was nerves strangled by muscular adhesions or simply muscle imbalance I never found out, but it took about 18 years to sort itself out. Just as well I didn't persevere with rest as a cure! After some abortive races in 1970, rest was what I tried in 1971, apart from Munro bagging. From April 1971 until July 1972 I climbed 100. Two major things happened in this period. First, I found that after 6 to 12 hours in the hills my leg felt looser and more normal, and second I wished to hell I was running the hills instead of walking them.

In March '72 I paid a visit to Mr Walker-Naddell, a retired orthopaedic surgeon turned osteopath in Glasgow. He manouvered a hypodermic syringe towards my leg. "What's that for?" I said, "my leg's not sore". "No, but it will be" he said and administered the local anaesthetic. He then dug into my leg with his hands and just about came out the other side. "Start running" he said. I went home in the train and went out right away. What a difference! After a number of false dawns that was me on the long road back. I had a couple of races that year. Cairngorm in June (5th) and Knockfarrel in September (also 5th). You meet some interesting people in hill races, and one of my first was at Knockfarrel. I was over the moon at getting back into competitive running, and, full of enthusiasm after the race, in the one and only shower remarked to another runner "that was a great fell race". "That's not a fell race" was the response. "You obviously haven't done Borrowdale or the Ben". "Well it's in the Fell Runners' Calendar" I offered in a defensive tone. My first meeting with John Blair-Fish, and it made me wonder about these other races. Little was I to know I would do the Ben six years later and the spectacular Borrowdale in 1983.

In late 1972 Kareen and I got married, and she was to become my companion (as a spectator) on many trips to hill races over the years. (With Myles now 9 years old there are two sets of kit to look after at events!). I enjoyed getting back to training in 1973 totalling over 3000 miles and did only 5 races, one of them being Knockfarrel where I moved up to 2nd, noting in my training diary that there was a vast improvement in both my fitness and my leg function in a year. But 1974 was the year I really decided to be a hill runner and met a number of the top runners at events such as Chevy Chase (Jeff Norman who was British Champion and ran in the 1976 Olympic marathon) and Creag Dubh at Newtonmore (Martin Weekes of Bingley, another British Champion). I repeated my 5th at Cairngorm and my 2nd at Knockfarrel. (This time I checked with the great Eddie Campbell if it was a fell race, and he said "Yes, it must be, it's in the Fell Runners' Calendar" !!

I found that some of the hill races were so compulsive that I went back to them year after year, namely Cairngorm, Achmony at Drumnadrochit, the 3 Peaks, Ben Lomond and Carnethy. There was something perpetually reassuring to know that a year later you could arrive at a venue at say 12 noon, and the same officials and same runners would be there. This happened for years, then gradually faces were missing for the unfortunate reasons that they had passed away, taken on family commitments, got injured or just got too old. But one face which was always there was Eddie Campbell, a triple Ben Nevis winner and inspiration to hundreds of hill runners. It is to my eternal regret that I missed his funeral in 1996 for the

simple fact I didn't know he had been stricken with cancer and had died at the age of 64. That year he missed the Ben for the first time in 44 years. The term "a legend in his lifetime" can be a trite one, but in Eddie's case it was not. He was always so pleased to meet newcomers to the hill running scene, such as Kath and Eddie Butler and Fraser Clyne, and as he got older received the biggest cheer of the day as he came onto the track at the end of a Highland Games hill race. In these days of high-tech racing studs it is a sobering thought to think Eddie won the Ben in canvas Dunlop Green Flash shoes!



In 1975 I won my first FELL race, Knockfarrel, and took second place in Cairngorm, Lomonds of Fife and Achmony. The following year was full of interesting experiences and saw me travelling further afield to sample new hills, taking 6th in Carnethy (in those days it started and finished in the town park), and 82nd in the 3 Peaks Race in Yorkshire. I was 2nd again in Cairngorm, 2nd in Knockfarrel and recall an amusing comment from Karen after I won Achmony. Three weeks before I had lost out in the battle for 4th place at Creag Dubh by 0.5sec to a 20 year old Fraser Clyne who should have had more respect for his elders. At Achmony we led the field to the top then on the road near the finish Fraser passed me. As we entered the Games park for the final battle, Karen said that written all over my face was the expression "this b.....'s not going to beat me again", and a desperate kick took me to a 3 second win.

Eddie Campbell finishing at Achmony

That year a classic race was born...Eddie Campbell's Lairig Ghru. 28 miles of the roughest, toughest terrain around. Eddie had been telling us about his plan at other races. It turned out to be a beautiful day and thirteen bold heroes lined up outside Braemar police station just after 11am on June 19th. Eddie's race briefing went like this. "Thanks for turning up lads. Now this is Braemar Police Station, the start, and we're going to run through the Lairig to Coylumbridge, turn left and finish at Aviemore Police Station. It's about 28 miles. Ready?.... GO!" We all thought "Hey wait a minute, what about marshalls, drinks, race numbers..." but off we set. Andy Pratt won in 3.12.40 with me a minute behind, and Andy's time remained a record for almost 20 years.



The start line at Achmony

What kind of training was I doing in 1976? Well, the annual mileage was around 2700 but this rose to 3000 in 1979. In '76 I didn't miss a single day (not something I recommend now), had a peak weekly mileage of 81 and did 24 races. There were 438 sessions. Apart from climbs in forests there was not a lot of hill work. A sample week 2 weeks before the Lairig was:-

Sunday 14mls; Monday 6mls; Tuesday 5 x 1000m; Wednesday 5.5mls; Thursday 6 x 400m uphill; Friday 4 x 800m; Saturday 8mls.

1977 was also full of hills and thrills. This was the year I decided to put on a local race and Scolty was born. This was to become a Fraser Clyde preserve, and there cannot be many races in Britain which have been dominated by one runner over such a long period. I never won Scolty but had a few seconds. It was a knacker weekend. Saturday was running round the course setting out the flags, often with Fraser's help, Sunday was running it, doing the prizegiving, then going round with Kareen taking in the flags, before typing up the results in the evening ready for posting in the morning after some sneaky photocopying.

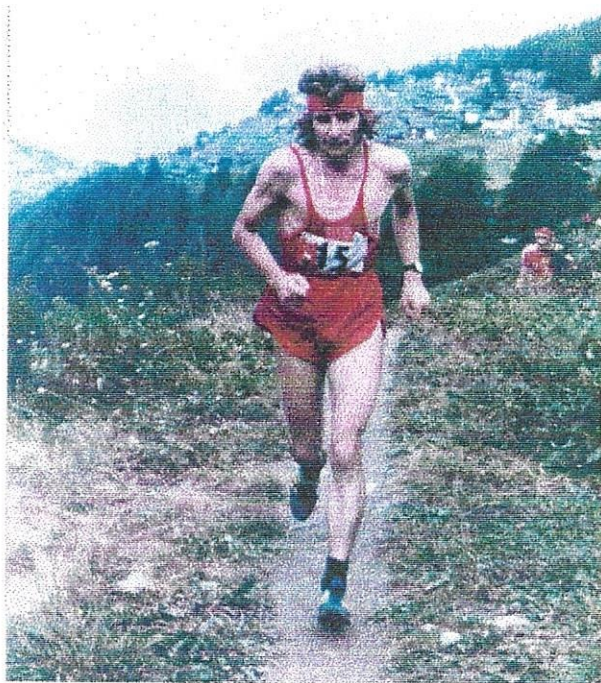
I improved to 41st in the 3 Peaks in the spring, but suffered in the latter stages and vowed that one year I would beat this course instead of the other way round. Carnethy (6th), Chevy Chase (12th), Cairngorm (2nd) and Achmony (3rd) all passed by, but the jewel in the crown was the fantastic Sierre to Zinal in southern Switzerland. This race is exceptional, 28km and 1900m ascent. I finished 99th out of 1000 and vowed to return. The route is surrounded by 5 megamountains and each year the finisher's medal depicts a different mountain. The secret is to try and get the set.

The 1978 Three Peaks was a disaster weather-wise for everyone and position-wise for me, but a tragedy for Ted Pepper of Blackheath Harriers and the organisers. The conditions for this, the 25th anniversary of the race, were the worst in living memory, with Pen-y-ghent, Whernside and Ingleborough all shrouded in mist and a fierce wind introducing a wind chill factor which forced dozens of runners to drop out. Many could not find the summit of Ingleborough and retraced their steps to Chapel-le-dale to check out. Eventually I found the summit, and headed for Horton in Ribblesdale and 150th place. The unfortunate Ted Pepper could not have been far away from me at the top, but strayed off course and died of exposure clad only in running gear. His body was found the following morning, and it was after this race that kit-checks were tightened up at long fell races. I read about the tragedy a couple of days after the race, and felt guilty that I had been disappointed with my poor position.

That year I competed in four races I hadn't sampled before, Ben Nevis (37th), the Half Ben (9th), Ben Lomond (8th) and the delightful Knock Hill in Crieff. It is an evening race with a gala atmosphere and lots of youngsters turn out. This was where I first met Peter Brooks of Lochaber, who was to die so tragically at the age of 60 on Ben Nevis in January 1998 while doing an 85 mile run. Peter and his wife Miriam kindly invited us back to their home in Crieff after the race for a shower and a meal. The race itself is about 3 miles, and this was the first year it had been held. The second year it was numbers and safety pins....not the drawing pins which were on offer in year 1!! I moved through the field passing kent faces until only one rival remained in front. He didn't look familiar and although I kicked like hell as we entered the Square at the finish, he got home by 10 metres. He turned round and as I went to shake his hand he said "It's OK, you've won. I'm in the fun run" !!! It turned out to be Jim McKechnie, a professional runner who hadn't been allowed to enter the main race. Thankfully those archaic days are gone.

Ben Nevis





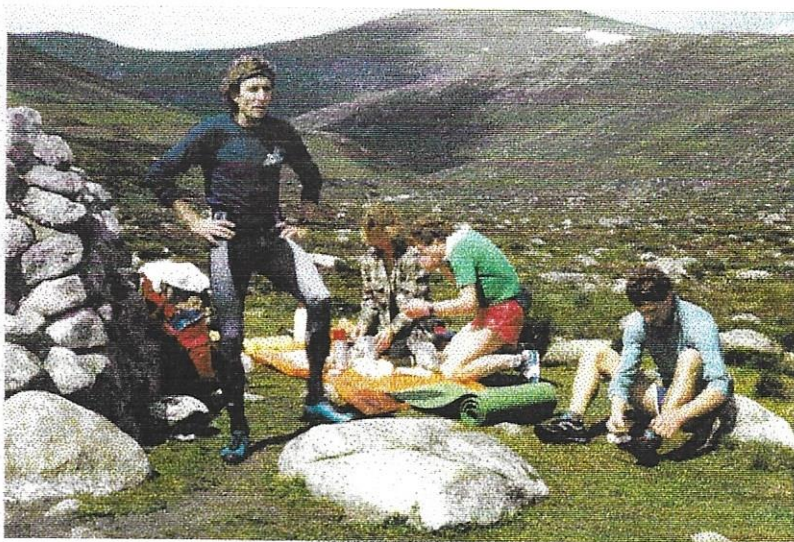
(Funny things happened at Knock. One year Sonia didn't get the first woman's award because they claimed she hadn't entered the women's race!). The week after Knock Hill I was privileged to be part of Charlie Ramsay's attempt on the peaks around Glen Nevis in under 24 hours. (Ramsay's Round). I helped pace Charlie in the initial stages, and was out for 11 hours before having a kip in my tent. In the morning I ran up Ben Nevis to meet Charlie on his descent. He appeared, going like a train, and I found I couldn't hold him in spite of him being on the go for almost a day! He was totally focussed, and reached the finish in 23hrs 58min. It was an inspiration to witness at close quarters an athlete achieving the supreme performance of his career. Other placings that year were 64th in Sierre-Zinal and my 4th consecutive second place in Cairngorm.

Sierre to Zinal

1979 was a cracker. 3000 miles, no days off, 36 years of age and going like a train. 13th in Carnethy and 3rd in Knockfarrel heralded a determined attempt to crack the 3 Peaks Race. Two extremely long runs in the penultimate week before the race seemed to do the trick as for the first time I got up Ingleborough without feeling like death slightly warmed up. On the way to the finish I was in the teens and kept controlling it so I didn't blow up. 17th! Perseverance pays off !

For the past 4 years I had come 2nd in Cairngorm and was getting fed up having a big lead at the summit then getting passed, usually by course record holder Bobby Shields. This year followed the same pattern, but when I was overtaken just before the Ptarmigan restaurant by Bobby and Ronnie Campbell I dug in and refused to get dropped. We descended with about 20 metres covering the three of us, and when we came to the flat section with under a mile to go I kicked. Nothing happened...the gaps stayed the same. We hit the horrible final 600 metres upgrade to the finish....and the gaps stayed the same. All three of us were inside the record with Bobby winning in 72.15 and me 7 seconds back in third. One of my most memorable and satisfying races on the hills.

I had been planning to have a crack at the late Eric Beard's 16 year old Four Cairngorm 4000 feet tops record 9 days later (this story is well documented elsewhere) and came out of the Cairngorm race with a hamstring injury. Happily, although I started the attempt with doubts about the leg, it did not trouble me and I reduced Eric's time by almost 7 minutes to 4 hours 34 mts 8 sec. with great navigational help from Dave Armitage. The record still stands 19 years on, but will be broken by someone more talented than me as long as they get as good weather and are as



Four Cairngorm 4000

psyched up as I was. (I remember my spectating father being shocked by my oaths of excitement with 2 miles to go as I realised I was going to take the record!).

1980 saw me doing Brent Knoll in the West Country, a race which would have been won by Dave Francis of Westbury if he hadn't been mis-directed. This was the day after he had done the AAA Olympic trial marathon! Dave is worth a mention. He is still running well as an over 50, and had some great runs in Sierre - Zinal including a 5th place a few hours after having covered the whole course to see what it was like. I had a few track races, 800 (2.08), 1500 (4.24), 3000 (9.10) and 5000 (16.10) and came 2nd in Dollar and Achmony. Aberdeen AAC travelled to Holmfirth for the Ian Roberts Memorial Relay to commemorate the great fell runner who had died in a mountaineering accident. I had developed a fascination for the Cairngorms and went back to do Glenmore Lodge to Cairngorm to Ben Macdui and return to the Lodge in 2.30.53. This is worth having a crack at.

I returned to Sierre-Zinal in 1981, then in 1982 began preparation for an assault on the veterans the following year. Kentmere was usually a championship race so I had a recce of it, coming 49th. In August I travelled to Strasbourg for the Oberhaslach to Rocher de Mutzig race with Mike Turner (see Part 1) and as is the custom on the continent entered as a vet., being in my 40th year. I came 3rd vet in 1.38, and this is the nearest I have come to dying (literally) in a race. I took a drink with about 3 miles to go, choked, and found I was unable to carry out the normally simple task of actually breathing. Fortunately air eventually began to get through to my lungs, and I concentrated on the next task...getting a vets prize.

Achmony hill

1983 was a megayear. I had a real crack at the British Vets Championships, and Kareen and I saw a lot of England as we covered a good few thousand miles. You had to do 10 races, 3 short, 3 long and 3 medium plus one more. I did eleven, Kentmere (4th), 3 Peaks (8th), Ben Lomond (2nd), Northern Counties (9th), Fairfield Horseshoe (4th), Buckden Pike (3rd), Kinniside (2nd), Melantee (4th), Borrowdale (18th), Burnsall (4th) and Thieveley Pike (4th). This took me to 4th place in the championship behind Paul Murray (Horwich), Andy Phillipson (Gosforth) and Norman Matthews (Horwich). This was tough but satisfying even though I finished the season like a zombie.



It was also a year I will never forget for another reason. In July, early one Sunday morning, my father, Fred, died suddenly at the age of 80. He had been working until late the previous evening on his sports journalism at GTV studios, as fit as a fiddle. I was due to organise a 10k race in Aberdeen that afternoon, and I knew what his advice would have been....get on with it. So I did. His life had been filled with sport and he was always pleased that I had found a niche where I also obtained great pleasure. The British championship was in full swing and I did Melantee the following weekend, then the horrendous Borrowdale (a proper fell race!) the week after. Kareen and I took my mother, Joy, on these two trips to keep her mind occupied, and it was after Borrowdale she thought she was going to lose the second member of her family in a fortnight. As usual after long ones I was sick, and on the way home stopped the car and lay down on my back in a layby. My mother was aghast. She asked Kareen if I was going to be OK. She responded quite calmly that this was my normal practice, and was called a "layby liedown". At long last my mother accepted that her son was a nutter.

Two of these races deserve further mention. It was at Burnsall that I first spoke to a runner who had just finished the Burnsall 10 mile road race in Longwood's colours.....Ewen Rennie!. The conditions at Kentmere were incredible. I set off in about 40th place. We had been warned that High Street at the far end of the course could be white-out, and sure enough as we proceeded the snow came down. A lot of runners were running back towards me. At first I thought this was an out and back section, but then realised they were dropping out! I carried on and got to High Street with 2 guys. I said "Where do you think we're placed" One looked at me in an odd manner and said "Are you serious...we're in the lead". I was chuffed for a while, but had descent problems in the deep snow and finished 25th (3rd vet).

In 1984 I completed my 100th hill race, won the Scottish Vets championship race at Ben Lomond in 10th place and also the inaugural Scottish Vets championship grand prix along English lines. I retained that title the following year, but the highlight was the setting up of a time for the Cairngorm Six 4000's with Dave Armitage and Phil Kammer. We took 11hrs 39mts 04secs for the 12000 foot climb, 40 mile trek round Ben Avon, Beinn a Bhuird, Cairngorm, Ben Macdui, Cairn Toul and Braeriach. I have always maintained I was the 3rd strongest of the three of us on this one! Dave and Phil were naturals at this distance whereas I had great problems in taking on board the necessary food and fluid.

At the end of the year I returned to Aberdeen one Sunday evening, after helping Graham Milne organise a road race in Peterhead, to take my mother to our house for tea, to find her dead. I realised that the two people who had encouraged me in my running in a quiet way from 5 years of age were now both gone, and also how much I owed to their support.

1986 saw the beginning of a change of direction for me. My 1969 leg injury was easing out with all the hill running, together with regular treatment from Dave Campbell in Edinburgh, and I made tentative steps towards a return to the roads, including a 33.36 10k at Harrow. There were some noteworthy events on the hills however. Carnethy was run in horrendous conditions ("I was a 1986 Carnethy survivor" T-shirts were suggested) but Dave, Phil, Eddie Butler and I had good runs with me taking first vet in 37th. Chapelgill was memorable for an off course incident. Phil and I were changing in the front of the car before the race, with Kath and Eddie in the back. The weather was really wild, and as I was taking off my pants I commented "Isn't nature wonderful". The response from Kath in the back was "You must be joking!" You can't take some people anywhere.....

The Commonwealth Games were in Edinburgh in the summer, and a run up Arthur's Seat starting and finishing in Meadowbank Stadium was organised. Almost 100 ran; I was 23rd in 23.21 with Eddie 20 seconds back, and Kath got under 30 minutes.

1987 was a virtual write-off due to a ghastly heel blister sustained in the Inverness 10k (ruddy roads!). It went septic and then necrotic and meant I missed my beloved Scolty for the first time in 11 years. It severely compromised my return to the roads for a while but, like most things, eventually recovered.

However 1988 was the year which saw a major shift in my targets and from 9 hill races that year I went to two in 1989 (Craig Dunain and Scolty). I was really getting stuck into cross country and roads as my old leg problem disappeared. Still, there were three long ones. One of Kath's targets was to have a crack at a time for the 4 Cairngorm 4000's. We ran round the Three Peaks race in 4 hours 52, then Eddie, Kath and I tackled the big one on 16 July. Kath had a blinder and was really strong in the latter stages, setting up a time of 6.44.58 which still stands. The three of us tackled Sierre-Zinal a month later. Kareen was 7 months pregnant with Myles and I remember as I lay on a makeshift hospital bed on a drip after the race thinking "I'm not coping with these long ones. I'd better play safe if I want to make it to fatherhood". A layby lie down is one thing, a hospital one is a different matter. And so I made the decision to come off the hills and hit the country and roads. It seemed to work as I got my first international vest for twenty years 10 weeks later in the Scotland v England v Wales vets cross country.

One thing is worthy of mention. After all these hill races, I never succumbed to an injury of any consequence, whereas in 1992 I began to get knee problems which lasted for 5 years. (Thankfully I am now healthy again). I believe the hills made my quads so strong that they protected my knees, whereas road running does little favours for quad strength.

In conclusion, this has been a long dissertation. I hope readers of the Cosmic Comic have enjoyed hearing of my exploits on the hills (and those before the hills). If nothing else I hope that the elements of enjoyment, perseverance and humour have trickled through. I firmly believe that a positive attitude, a realisation that we are incredibly lucky to be able to participate as runners and the knowledge that we are but pebbles among the scree and boulders of the High Tops, go a long way to enriching our time on this planet as sportsmen and women.

Happy running!!

MANX MOUNTAIN MARATHON – 11 APRIL 1998

30.5 miles 8000 ft

NIAL WATSON

The Isle of Man does not immediately spring to mind as a place with an abundance of hills. Unfortunately nobody told the locals who have come up with this event.

The event has two running classes: elite and standard and a walkers class. The difference between the classes is that an elite runner should take less than 5¾ hours to finish, a standard runner 7½ hours and a walker 10½ hours. The walkers start at 0730 and the runners at 0915. The start is in Ramsey and the course meanders across the island to Port Erin taking in a few scenic bumps on the way. There are checkpoints (on the tops naturally) where one punches an orienteering type card. To stop people from dilly dallying various checkpoints have cut off times.

Well that's the ground rules what about the course? The first bump is North Barrule which accounts for just under a quarter of the climbing. Then it is off to Snaefell via Clagh Ouyr. Down Snaefell to Beinn-y-Phott, across to Carraghan and then down to Injebreck farm which is about the ten mile point. From here it is up Colden and along to Slieau Ruy then down to Greebe Bridge and along a disused railway line to St John's (about 18 miles). Off up to Slieau Whallian and then back down to the road to get across to the chimney at the Cross Vein Mine. From the chimney it's a skip up South Barrule, across to Cronk ny Arrey Laa (where do they get these names from?) and nip down to the Sloc. Pop along the path to Fleshwick Bay, up the 700-ft climb to Bradda Head, along the cliff tops to a tower and finish at Port Erin

Once I had looked over the course my initial plan was to catch the next plane. The final plan was to walk the climbs and trot the rest to get to Injebreck 30 minutes before the cut off time and then stick to their time intervals for the next cut offs.

At the start the rather chilly wind was behind us but this did not stop one runner crawling up North Barrule on all fours! Snaefell had a covering of snow and ice and I managed to fall over, which probably accounts for its name. Alas I totally failed to sustain an injury that would have meant a graceful retiral. Oh well on we go. I arrived at Injebreck 5 minutes ahead of schedule. On the approach I got a bit carried away and ended up nearly garrotted myself. After that it was over the hill to St John's and goodbye to the northern hills. The ascent of South Barrule was meant to be all very unpleasant with the long heather however it didn't strike me as that bad. Cronk ny Arrey Laa from a distance looks quite formidable but as you get closer it takes on a much more civilised appearance. After that it's downhill to the Sloc and the final cut off point. I discovered that I had gained 25 minutes on my schedule and I was the 71st person through but the winner had probably finished, showered, packed up and gone home. From the Sloc to the finish is quite acceptable except for the rather nasty climb out of Fleshwick Bay. Incidentally the path can't map read because it goes up the hill to the right and not the left. The wind was now blowing onshore which was just as well since there is a bit of cliff top running before the finish at Port Erin which was deserted not even a Manx cat!

My time was 7 hours and 24 minutes and the winner took 4 hours 53 minutes with the winning lady taking 5 hours 53 minutes. Figuring out one's position is a bit tricky since the Manx have adopted a unique numbering system - every now and then they omit a place! I was not going to let this defeat me and calculated that I was 61st out of a running field of 110.



THE SKYE RIDGE

by Phil Kammer

Early it was; and if some fantasy was about to flicker upon my sleeping brain, it was rudely chased back to who-knows-where as our alarm rattled dream-time into real-time, Sligachan two a.m.

Dimly remembered enthusiasm prised me from the comfort of my bunk to stand wide-eyed in the darkness on the cold floorboards of Sandy Coghill's bunkhouse, sending a flattened palm racing across plaster to the hard edge of the door frame, searching out the light switch.

Peering at the harsh lit scene through creased slits for eyes, Brain creaked and moaned his way from his high perch, slowly uncurling weary bones into the empty frame of a promising day.

Communication was monosyllabic. We had both been here before. A month before to be precise, on Brian's 50th birthday. In a heatwave's morning mist we had been slowly poached, then willingly offered ourselves into the oven of the high black ridge above Coruisk.

Progress then was slow and slower still as the sun rose relentlessly to searching high noon bringing babbling crowds swarming upwards onto the ridge from the green glen far below. Then, our relief upon dropping into the ice cool shade of the thearlaich-dubh gap evaporated almost immediately as we waited angrily for an incompetent rope of three to jibber their way up and out of where they should not have been in the first place.

The process of attrition which followed saw us plunging glenward from Bruach na Frithe in darkness and despair, a completion so near and yet too far.

And so, at a desperately early hour we delivered ourselves again, entombed in darkness, this time to the pleasing path that rises quickly from Glen Brittle to the boggy holes and riven stream beds on our way to Gars-Bheinn. There we halted for breath, to gaze and lust over our day's planned path.

Perspiration was giving way to inspiration as we took in the scene from the Cuillin's southmost summit. The great ocean and narrow inner sound shimmered as they held the island in broad, cool fingers of mist.



Below our feet the corrie was a seething cauldron of vapour, boiling over to evaporate in thin tendrils as the sun crept ever upwards for a brief moment I felt my own frail fantasies begin to entwine with the endless progress of a universe.

Our quick passage over the slabby roof of Sgurr nan Eag led us onto the Caisteal A' Garbh-Choire. This appropriately named 5'0 foot tower of rough peridotite stands fortress like across the ridge.

Although it can be avoided, the moderate climb on superb rock should not be missed. Without using a rope the descent from the castle is a little awkward but nevertheless we chose to downclimb and began the scramble up to the superbly named Sgurr Dubh Na Da Bheinn.

The munro top of Sgurr Dubh Mor lies out on a spur to the east of the main ridge, so we left our sacks by a boulder and set off down the screes to the col below. From the narrow summit of Dubh Mor we drank in the magnificent panorama of the entire ridge, from our starting point on Gars Bheinn to the shapely and alluring Sgurr Nan Gilleann at the northern edge of a long black line of peaks. Having regained the main ridge we descended into a deserted and uncomfortably chilly Thearlaich-Dubh gap. The problem of crossing this cleft was solved by McKenzie, Collie and King in 1891 thus avoiding the need to descend to the screes far below and the inevitable long climb back up to gain Sgurr Thearlaich. Eager to be getting on, Brian tackled the awkward 60 foot crack to return us to the son's warm kiss.

With the rope shouldered we continued upwards to the crest of the Great Stone Chute and a short scramble onto the airy summit of Sgurr Alasdair, the highest point on Skye, about the size of an average dining table with a 2000 foot abyss at the edge. The peak was named in honour of a local sheriff and mountaineer, Alexander Nicolson who carried out a great deal of exploration on the Cuillin in the mid 19th century.

We scrambled over Sgurr Thearlaich and quickly downclimbed to the foot of King's Chimney which would lead us directly onto the exposed summit of Sgurr Mhic Coinnich or McKenzie's peak in honour of the local Victorian guide John MacKenzie of Sconser. It would be easy to walk past King's Chimney on Collie's Ledge but we had previously agreed that this unassuming slab of rock provides the most delightful pitch of climbing on the Cuillin Ridge Traverse.

Now at half height on the slab I was revelling in my position and having protected the rope with a sling around a jammed rock in the corner crack I launched upwards to the little overhang that caps the slab, stepped airily rightwards to avoid it and stood on the summit of McKenzie's peak. There's a memorial plaque up there to a long dead climber; touching, but inappropriate in my humble opinion, an intrusion for later visitors if you like. On several occasions over the past 25 years I have resisted the temptation to tip it into the corrie, if only for fear that it might despatch some other poor soul on the way down.

Easy ground led us down from Mhic Coinnich to the red scree ramp girdling the foot of the An Stac Buttress. This in turn led us up a steep slabby gully to the inaccessible pinnacle of Sgurr Dearg; the Munroist's Bogey as it is the only Munro top in the land that involves exposed rock climbing to gain the summit.

The pinnacle is a remarkable monolith consisting of a narrow wall of rock about 100 yards in length perched on the sloping eastern roof of the summit ridge. It's western end rises 80 vertical feet to the highest point. From our approach the pinnacle presents itself as a tapering 100 yards edge rising 200 feet from the gully to the left and plunging some 2000 feet to the corrie floor on the right.

I have never been happy leading roped parties up this route as, despite the climbing being easy, belays are poor and a fall by the second climber would almost certainly result in an impressive swing and tricky retrieval. It is far safer for inexperienced climbers to be guided up the short end of the pinnacle and to return by abseiling or downclimbing the same route.

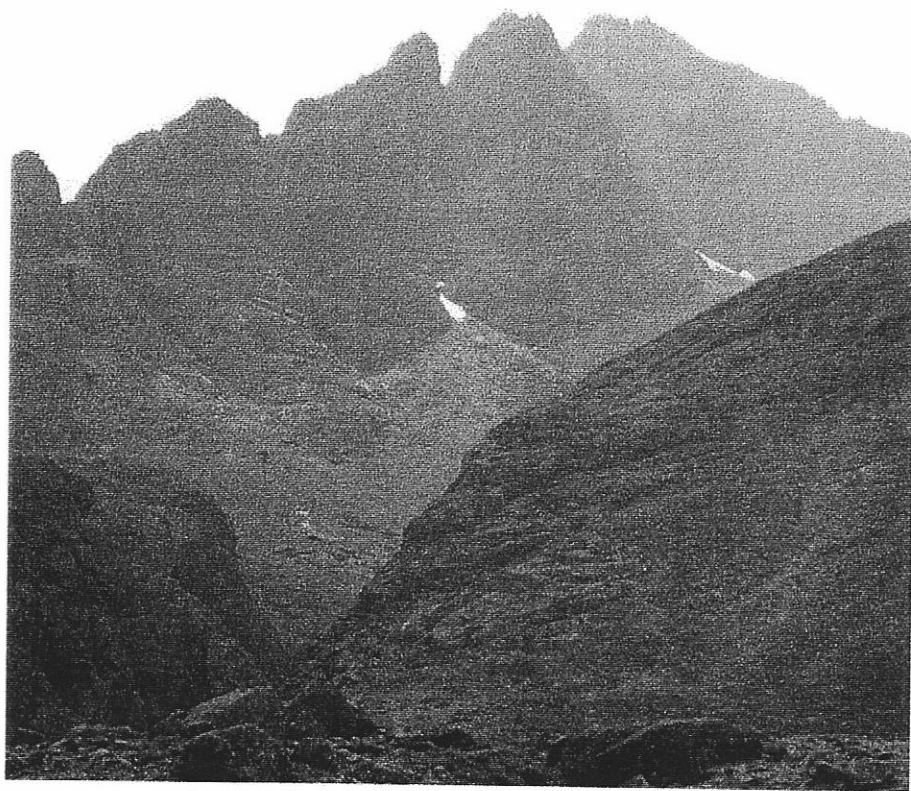
We seemed not to hesitate at all as we emerged from the confines of the gully onto the sudden airiness of the pinnacles east ridge. Moving quickly and unroped, my senses were buzzing to the immenseness of space around me. The short, steep step at mid height is also alarmingly narrow with large holds polished to a glassy sheen by the passage of many hands and feet.

In no time it seemed, we had roped down from a brief encounter with the summit to continue over the easy ground of Sgurr na Banachdich towards the beautiful little pyramid of Sgurr Thormaid. Although over shadowed by it's neighbours, Thormaid makes up for it's lack of statue with it's elegant form. It is as pleasing to the tongue as to the eye with the Gaelic pronunciation "Horomach" which translates as Norman's peak in honour of professor Norman Collie.

Collie and McKenzie were lifelong companions in their exploration of the Cuillin and were buried side by side in the little graveyard at Sconser.

From Glen Brittle, Sgurr A' Ghreadaidh appears as an imposing dome of rock dominating the central area of the ridge. This impression is quickly dispelled as the scramble to it's summit reveals two peaks separated by a sensational knife edge hung above an abyss of horrifying proportion. The sheer wildness of this summit sets the tone for the following section over Sgurr A' Mhadaidh and Bidein Druim Nan Ramh where a combination of intricate route finding and exposed scrambling conspire to provide absorbing mountaineering.

The steep scramble to the summit of Sgurr A' Mhadaidh placed us upon an exposed crest of rock high above the long glen of Coire Uisge. Our eyes drawn once more to the compelling line of peaks, we contemplated the three teeth, a series of unavoidable towers and gaps leading on to Bidean. The climbing is of moderate standard but always exposed, requiring constant attention and a confident style, particularly when descending. A narrow staircase of angular basalt steps leads naturally and fairly easily to the south summit of Bidean Druim Nan Ramh, from where a short descent led us onto the bridge rock, a massive boulder jammed conveniently across a narrow split in the ridge.



The central and north summits were gained over a delightful variety of slabs, cracks, walls and corners until all of a sudden we found ourselves on the easier open ground below Bruach na Frithe. It would have been too easy to relax our pace and concentration but ahead of us beyond the benign hump of Bruach na Frithe lay the Bhasteir Tooth, the west ridge of Sgurr nan Gilleann and a long walk back to Sligachan.

The tooth is a remarkable rock feature, well visible in outline from Sligachan. An encounter with it on the ridge discloses the alarming angularity of it's architecture and the - awe inspiring verticality of it's boundaries. Deep shadows are cast on the northern side and my feeling of desperation was hardly lifted as we teethered across a narrowing ledge on the sunny side to where it terminated next to a loose block of shattered rock. This provided the only belay point for our rope and did nothing to inspire confidence as we knew that a similar block mentioned in old guide books had long since slipped from it's nest.

To make matters worse, this temporary feature would have to be used to gain the chimney and crack above. By prior agreement it was to be my lead and as was becoming rapidly apparent, a dubious pleasure. Curling the fingers of both hands into the crack between block and mountain, I eased my weight gingerly upwards as the rock creaked but did not visibly move. I felt safer standing on top of it rather than pulling on it and not the least because from this position I could reach a solid projection point for the rope. The rock was now solid and retained some of the sun's warmth so that it almost reassured me as I climbed out of the chimney onto a narrow vertical crack. With another

point of protection arranged I took a moment to savour my position. I had been moving up and rightwards from the block and I now had an exhilarating amount of space below me. My spirits lifted as I made the last moves up the crack to the summit of the tooth where I secured the rope to bring Brian up from the gloomy depths beside that awful block. At the very tip of the tooth we lay flat on our stomachs peering over the edge into the abyss, accentuated by the undercut face directly below us.

By now we were eager for Gillean whose shapely form we could almost reach out and touch from the summit of Am Bhasteir. I could sense a quickening of pace as our tiredness gave away for elation.

Nicolson's Chimney provided our entry to her western ridge leading seductively to our object of desire. Hands were shaken and refreshment taken. From it's insulated haven deep down in my sack, I drew a small bottle of coke, surprisingly cold, magnificently refreshing, a final act in celebration of our passage and reverence to the Cuillin hills.

The long march to Sligachan did little to dull my senses although aware of the 10,000 feet of climbing in my legs.

We were mostly silent as Sligachan drew closer, reliving moments from an intense day and dreaming of the cold beer that awaited us.

On our departure in the morning, we had posted the keys through Sandy's letterbox. As no-one was in the bunkhouse and Sandy was not at home, the door was firmly locked. Luckily we could prise a window open and by climbing on the dustbin gained entry, harder than anything on the ridge!

We had taken fourteen hours from Glen Brittle to follow the ridge back to Sligachan. A good time I think, made possible by favourable conditions, few other parties on the route (this was mid-week) and most importantly I believe, our ability to move confidently over difficult and exposed ground. This is particularly important where down climbing is involved as this activity is often intimidating, requiring the body to lean further out from the rock in search of holds.

We carried 45 metres of 9mm rope which we used on four occasions:

To abseil into and climb out of the Thearlaich Dobh Gap; To ascend King's Chimney;

To abseil from the inaccessible pinnacle and to ascend Naismith's route on the Bhasteir Tooth.

This expedition can be tackled in a variety of ways. Our original attempt was to make "The round" from Sligachan, walking to Coruisk and returning via the Ridge. Success on that occasion was frustrated by extremely hot conditions and being hampered at key sections such as the T-D gap. We were not allowed to climb past a pair who would have taken forever on the In. Pinn. Being in no mood to argue, we left them to what they believed to be their property as we missed out this essential feature.

We both knew that the traverse would be best enjoyed by travelling light. A high bivouac with the need to carry all the accoutrements was out of the question as a heavy sack would have hindered our progress beyond enjoyment. Obviously, to travel light is to travel fast and so avoid a night out on the ridge.

There is no water on the ridge and unless a time consuming detour is made into a coire, it must all be carried from the start. We drank copiously on the march in to Gars-Bheinn and filled our bottles before the ascent. We each carried two litres but a degree of dehydration was inevitable. Half a litre per hour would have been required to avoid this condition but to carry upwards of six litres each was out of the question. In any case, the specialist re-hydration facility available at the Sligachan Hotel provided a very effective and enjoyable remedy.

Most visitors will enjoy the Cuillin experience in short excursions to the most accessible points of the ridge. To enjoy the whole meal in one sitting requires fitness and preparation. Previous experience and exploration on the Cuillin will avoid tedious errors in route finding.

Favourable weather is equally important, not only for a safe passage but also to savour the magnificent panoramas from the heights.

So long as I am able I will return again to Skye for that special atmosphere created from an ancient, scoured landscape. In June, on Gars Bheinn's barren screes, perfect blooms of sea thrift erupt and in their short life drink the dew that ever so slowly will return all this to the ocean's floor.

The Island Peaks Race 1997

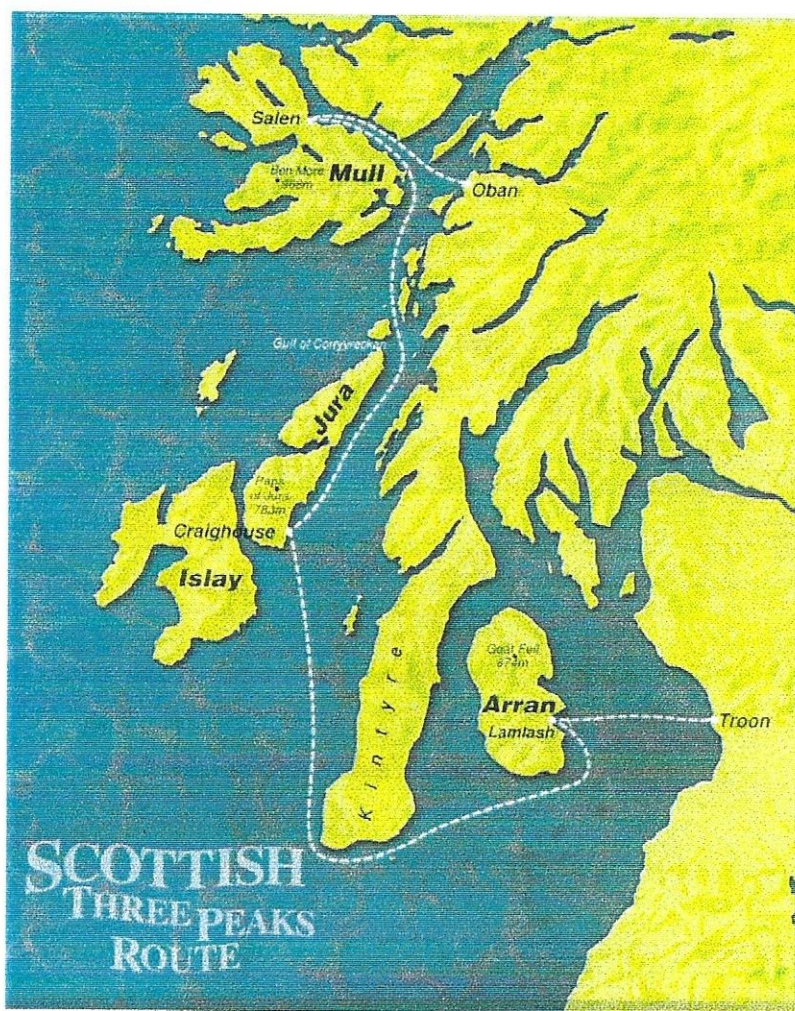
I first heard of this race when I was doing a lot of sailing, and running infrequently. From a sailor's perspective it has the reputation of being slightly mad; starting in Oban, dropping off people to run up and down three sets of hills, (Ben More on Mull, Paps of Jura and Goat Fell on Arran), sixty miles, 12000 feet and finishing in Troon with a bit of sailing in between. My interest picked up when I read an interview in 'Yachts and Yachting' (my regular read at the time) where some bloke called Rigby claimed that it was the race that every hillrunner wanted to do. The interviewer, a sailor, couldn't comprehend why anyone would want to subject themselves to 'the equivalent of three marathons in a weekend'. The hillrunners couldn't understand the sailors wanting to stay up all night in the crashing waves and wind. As someone who had done a bit of both, it appealed and with some friends from Inverness and Thurso we decided to enter.

Other Cosmics have done the race, Tim G, Dave A and Phil K that I know of. I spoke to them about it during the winter, each seemed encouraging.

The race started in Oban on a mid May Friday afternoon, at the sailing club with a six mile run over a small hill to the south of the town. There was a big field, of extremes of quality ranging from internationalists to plodders. The runners pounced into dinghies and were rowed out to the yachts milling around in the bay to set off around a navigation buoy and then off to Salen on Mull. I saw Katey Boo on the shore as we waited for our team members. She had a place on a rather palatial 38 ft Jeanneau called Scarlet Fever, which was being sailed as an all rounder, meaning that as many crew as possible ran and were scored according to a formula in order to ensure that some were fresh for the sailing. Most other boats had three sailors and two runners but we had three wanting to run with two sailors and I was sitting out this initial leg. We stood on the shore waiting for our team members to arrive and watched all the familiar faces from championship events trundling past. Graeme and Phil, my team members, soon arrived. We rowed furiously out to Sula, our 27 ft monohull and stormed off to join the parade around the bay.

We arrived in Salen trailing the fleet by half an hour having had problems with our spinnaker coming across the Sound. The run on Mull went reasonably well, though in retrospect our route choice could have been faster and I understand why some had come across to recce the hill before hand. We had made inroads into the lead of the fleet. Meanwhile the leaders in ultra high tech trimirans had scooted away off into the distance.

I woke at six the next morning to a light breeze as we ran down the Sound of Jura (in sailing terms that means going directly in a down wind direction.) The light winds meant slow speed, the atmosphere was gloomy and the fleet had pulled ahead overnight. Ten miles and six hours later we pulled into the bay at Craighouse. Scarlet Fever pulled out as we approached, well in front of most. Lucky Katey I thought. It became apparent that the fleet had had more favourable winds overnight and while we had been stuck in the doldrums they had been sending their runners around the Paps in the mist. For a full six and a half hours we followed Walsh trails. Running the scree on Jura proved difficult. Although at the time our route seemed reasonable,



discussion afterwards suggested that knowing the gullies on the Paps really saves time. On board again we left Craighouse in light breeze and headed south. Around us we could see the spinnakers of our colleagues as we tucked into pasta and chocolate in Tracey like quantities. Then I slept soundly.

When I woke again the mist was shrouding around the cliffs of the Mull of Kintyre and the tide was ripping towards us, stopping us entering the Firth of Clyde. The wind was not strong enough to overcome the current and we decided to try and row towards a more favourable tide. As soon as we picked up speed the oars on our nearest competitors came out and within ten minutes there was a rowing competition. Two oars don't propel two ton yachts very well and soon the sweat was dripping. What a way to spend Sunday morning. I claim we won. The wind picked up soon, a brisk force four unfortunately from the direction of Arran. We started beating into a foul chop, the current still trying to push us back and the waves crashing over the bow.

Four hours later the boat was still heeled at 35 degrees as we beat into the wind. The sailors were cold and becoming increasingly fatigued, they had had four hours sleep in the last thirty six. All hope of catching the fleet had been carried off with the current round Kintyre. We were cold and damp, even down below, and being heeled at thirty five degrees meant that everything was becoming an effort - eating and drinking was difficult anyway because of sea sickness although stugeron helped. The gas cooker had leaked, adding to the nausea and for a brief period the valves on the toilet had been left open producing an effective siphon into the bilges. Cold, damp and uncomfortable I remembered Tim Griffin telling me how much you learn to dislike the word 'about', a command hailed by the helmsman meaning that the boat was about to pass through the eye of the wind and lurch from an uncomfortable heel in one direction to an equally uncomfortable heel in the other.

At this point we were all feeling physically and mentally drained. It seemed that the elements were conspiring to prevent us getting anywhere near Arran and soon the wind started dropping again. Pete, the skipper, had been using the engine out of gear to recharge the batteries overnight, which contravened the rules but in the circumstances seemed a small compromise for a degree of comfort. I dozed in order to pass time while trying to eat (but not managing.) Up on deck the sailors were bordering on exhausted, cold and damp. Our spirits were depressed, no-one seemed to be communicating with each other and the situation felt pretty grim. I kept dozing. When I woke the engine drone had changed and I thought it must be in gear. This was a contravention of any sailing rule. Pete came down below. 'Runners' he said....

So we made a collective decision to retire from the race. We engaged the engine and headed straight for Troon. The sense of disappointment and failure was evident, but we all tried to bolster each other with a jolly front and trivial jokes.

Now, twelve months later the disappointment has almost gone. We are preparing for another go in ten days. Hopefully this time we will work together as a team better and we certainly have a better understanding of the size of the challenge. Hopefully the elements will be slightly more friendly too.

As we had been rowing around the Mull, Katey had been arriving hot on the heels of the overall leaders on the finish line in Troon. Scarlet Fever had been blessed by favourable tides and winds at the appropriate places. She had been second monohull to finish and won the all rounder class. Katey picked up her prize at the prizegiving in Glasgow in November, a great evening when the sailors and runners retell their own race tales during the dark winter nights. Katey's crew made glowing references to her ability to learn the ropes quickly, with limited sailing experience previously.

Congratulations Katey.

Kevin ExCampervan.

BEYOND THE MARATHON

Many Cosmics have come to hill running from a road running background where the popular endurance event is the marathon. However beyond the marathon there are events like the Speyside 50K, the Two Bridges (a mere 36 miles), the London to Brighton (55 miles) and various 100Ks.

Most of us take two and a half to four hours for a marathon and there are plenty of long hill races that will take that long. However for those of us that want to run for longer off road what's available? Loads is the answer! Basically they can be divided into three categories :-

- * Anytime challenges
- * Mountain marathons
- * LDWA and similar events

Anytime challenges range from things such as the Ballater Tops and the Cairgorm Four Thousands to much more serious challenges such as the Charlie Ramsey and Bob Graham Rounds. For those venturing to Scotland's Southern Provinces (England & Wales) there are hosts of anytime challenge routes ranging from twenty to several hundred miles in length. Generally simple completion is the goal but if you fancy running them you can even find yourself as holder of the fastest known completion eg. Steve Pryor for the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path or myself for the Cal-Der-Went Walk and Spen and Holme Valley Circulars.

Mountain marathons offer a variety of distances but usually demand running in pairs and carrying all the kit necessary for an overnight camp. (But events such as the Capricorn are a very pleasant exception to these guidelines). Many Cosmics are regular participants in the Karrimor, Lowe Alpine and Mourne Mountain Marathons but they can occasionally be prised away from their regular partners to take a novice round (or not as the case may be eg. Bob Sheridan and I at the 1996 Mourne or Margaret Stafford and I at the 1997 Karrimor!).

LDWA, more properly called the Long Distance Walkers Association, co-ordinate a whole host of **events** ranging from 8-10 miles to the annual 100 miler. The vast majority of these routes will be off road and nearly all of them are in the Southern Provinces. Whilst some events frown on runners, most will let you participate even if some make you take a later start than genuine walkers. Some of the most popular/accessible are listed in the Scottish Hill Running Calendar - High Peak (teams of 4, 56 miles), Wuthering Hike (33miles and 4400 feet climb for pairs) and the Manx Mountain Marathon - the latter being a misnomer as it is a solo race over 31 miles to be completed inside ten hours.

For most people, even Cosmics, completion of one of these events would be goal in itself but if you want to do a Charlie Ramsey or Bob Graham Round than events such as the Wuthering Hike and the Fellsman (61miles & 11000 feet climb) may just be part of your build up. So it had been for me in 1988 when I did my Bob Graham Round.

With a Charlie Ramsey Round on the cards I needed a partner for the **Wuthering Hike**. Despite our DNF at the Karrimor - we actually did more than the required course by me marking the wrong control five on day one - Margaret said yes to my offer of a partnership at the Wuthering Hike

(mind you that was the evening just before Christmas that the hard core tried to drink Under the Hammer dry!).

Anyway Friday the thirteenth of March sees us heading south although my union meeting in Edinburgh means we don't arrive in Haworth until after nine. It takes another half hour to find the B&B - this doesn't auger well for tomorrow! But once in we find we've again struck lucky with a very pleasant family room and an equally pleasant and helpful landlady.

We're up at 6-45 for breakfast and a wander down to registration. Amongst the first people we see are the Carnethy hordes and Angela Mudge has the cheek to tell me that we won't win the mixed as Adrian and Helene are doing it - we knew that.

The start comes all too soon with Margaret still trying to stuff her jacket into an already bulging bum bag. I unsling my jucksac and stuff it in but by that time Adrian and Helene (and everybody else) is away and we never catch sight of them again. A well there's always next year.

Almost as soon as we get going Margaret begins to feel a pull in her hamstring from the Inverness Half the previous week. She keeps hoping it will wear off as she warms up - but it doesn't! Meanwhile I'm conscious of little tweaks in my knee every few hundred yards - at least when I stop at the first checkpoint (at 8 miles; 1h20m) and pull on an elasticated bandage it seems to improve.

By now we've settled into a steady rhythm although Margaret is finding the boggy bits hard as they aggravate her hamstring. A windfarm dominates the horizon for a long time but we eventually run past it and into the first main feeding station. Sixteen miles, 2hr37min and they offer us hot-dogs - don't they know that a significant minority, if not majority of serious fell-runners, are vegetarians (but then again there probably wasn't any meat in them). We settle for mugs of tea and Margaret has a plain bap while I try to nibble on some Fox's biscuits. Two miles further on I throw away a half nibbled biscuit!

Down past the golf course and into Todmorden - with no-one immediately visible ahead some kids try to direct us in the wrong direction but we outguess them and refind the route. (This was one of only two places in the whole 33 miles where we were a little uncertain of which way to go).

I point out the phallic symbol on the skyline and Margaret is not amused especially when I tell her it's, Stoodley Pike, the sixth checkpoint. With nearly all the climb coming in the second half its down and over the River Calder (and the canal) and back up the other side. More food is on offer at Mankinholes Youth Hostel but we settle for more tea (with sugar, in my case) and its on to Stoodley Pike. 19.5 miles, 3h31m - only a half-marathon to go!

In the woods down to Hebden Bridge I adjourn to commune with nature only for Margaret to tell me that four mixed teams have passed us while I've been wiping my bum. Nonetheless I insist in walking up the road to Heptonstall.

Downhill through the woods to the Blue Pig WMC - supposedly only half a mile but it takes us nine minutes! Then we start climbing again. By now virtually everyone around us is walking anything uphill and we catch a few folk up as we prove that Cosmics are true Hillbashers. With over a marathon behind us the tarmac track up to Top O't Stairs sees everyone walking but most folk manage the run down to Leeshaw Reservoir. With the Haworth windfarm windmill in sight

everyone is draining the reserve tank but the climb back up to the Penistone Hill toilets separates the men from the boys - guess which category we fitted into.

Across the moor and down into Haworth - the cobbled main street is agony enough in itself without having to dodge the hordes of tourists. Margaret is really suffering but cheered on by Westies and Carnethy we make it into the school and the finish line (note that for future reference) - 6h15m for 72nd out of 187 starters. Ahead of us Helene and Adrian finish third in 4h34m whilst Angela and her partner demolish the women's record, previously held by Helene and Hillary Walker, by 51 minutes as they record 4h43m. If only we hadn't missed the start!

Margaret doesn't feel up to holding the proffered meal so I pile both our plates on a tray. Seconds later I've abandoned both the tray and Margaret and am outside retching horridly and wishing I'd something in my stomach that I could puke up!

Half an hour later Margaret assures me that my shade of grey is improving. Her plates are clean but most of mine eventually ends up in the bin. We retire back to the B&B and I'm sufficiently recovered to tell Margaret that if she's going to lie around like that she should take her top off! While Margaret waits for the water to heat for her bath I take a shower (not cold!) and watch the rugby league - did I really play that?

By 5pm we've both stiffened up but pangs of hunger drive us down the stairs -with the B&B doubling up as a tearoom we don't have far to go for some splendid soup and cakes. The Westies/Carnethy rabble visit the bakery opposite to buy some buns (they're squatting on the church hall floor) and I go out to exchange customary insults. Later however we join their kitty at the pub - apologies, we'll do the ritual penance. Helene leaves early - is she tired or jealous of Margaret sharing a room with me?

Sunday and we alternate dozing and driving - thankfully getting it right with the passenger dozing and the driver driving even if the driver's seat wasn't fully adjustable for Margaret.

Already Margaret's talking about getting right next year - no Inverness Half and a fully fit Ewen - what could we do (certainly not 4h34m but well under six, and Helene and Adrian may not be there!). Before that there's the Lowe Alpine and possibly the Mourne and the Karrimor (but if we did all that then we mightn't be speaking and would Janet still be speaking to me?).

Ewen Rennie



The Devils Burdens Relay, February 7th, 1998

I'd been here before - standing at the bottom of steep Bishop Hill in Scotlandwell on a bright Saturday morning in February. This was the start of leg 3 of the Devils Burden relay - a 4 leg, 6 person relay around the Lomond Hills, starting and ending in Falkland. Two years ago, Cosmics had startled the field when Wilson Moir had arrived at the changeover in the lead. Greg and I had then dropped to third place where the team finished. Today we had higher hopes as we chatted to the other runners waiting for the 2nd leg to appear. "Our last leg runner can do a 29 min 10km" Shettleston informed us. Oh great.

There's a stir as the Carnethy runner appears down the slope and their pair set off. A time warp then sets in such that the minute until the next runners appear seems like 10. There's then a flurry of activity as Dave arrives in company and Greg and I set off with Shettleston and Fife in a pack. The first part of Bishop Hill is so steep there's no question of running so we huff and puff up in a six. Once it levels slightly we break into our pairs and try running. With Carnethy up ahead, there's no point in holding back hoping the pairs we're with take a poor route - we might as well try and get ahead so we get our heads down. Towards the top, we pass Buzz coming the other way smiling - (dunno what about - he's another leg to do yet!). At the top of Bishop Hill, we've dropped Fife and have a slight lead over Shettleston.

There then follows an undulating run across the moor to the bottom of West Lomond. It's beautiful on top with the sun shining on a dusting of fresh snow. Not much chance to admire it though as 'rubberlegs' Barbour takes off along the small trods and tussocks and I put the map in my back pocket, remove my eyeballs and try to stay with him. The carrot is the Carnethy pair in front and we're definitely gaining at the same time as opening a gap on the two pairs behind. By the bottom of West Lomond, we're close enough to Carnethy that they're turning round and worrying - that's what we want! The climb is fast and furious as we seem to hang between the pair in front and Shettleston behind. At the top we meet Bob admiring the view - I run the last few yards so I'll be in front of Greg in the picture Ken takes and then leg it off the summit to give my knees a head start on the descent whilst Greg punches. We fly down the hill after Carnethy - too little snow this year to cushion the impact. At the bottom, the fields go on for ever. We pass the Shettleston support - silence! A final dash trying to minimise the gap and we set Dan off 20 secs behind a nervous looking Carnethy runner who's obviously heard about Dan. One and a half minutes later Shettleston hand over - you're going to need that 29min 10 km now mate!

We meet Steve and John, apparently still talking after the 1st leg despite Steve "f**king about" looking for the control on the top of East Lomond that had blown away. We jump into Dan's car, drive to the finish and jog back up to meet the runners. Dan appears 'jogging' along, looking very relaxed (what do I do wrong?) but with a good minutes lead on Carnethy and no sign of Shettleston. He disappears to the finish and we celebrate - Cosmics have won something!!

The ladies arrive - another close finish as Sonia has closed to within 1 1/2 minutes of Carnethy who've won. Sandwiched between them is Bob for Cosmic 'B' and a while later Buzz for Cosmic 'C' - 4 cosmic teams finishing! The results reveal that Christine and Margaret have shown most of the men the way on leg 1 on the way to a leg record and Phil and Phill need to take some route finding lessons off Catherine and Katy.

We troop off to the village hall and get some soup, catch-up on the other legs and have a general back-slap with the other clubs. The prize giving is delayed as the results take forever to be calculated and then disaster - whispers of disqualifications. Eventually Adrian stands up to give out the prizes and announces that Cosmic 'A' and Carnethy have both been disqualified as neither punched the control on the last leg. Shettleston, who were third home, were promoted to first. The ladies race was unaffected.

To say we were disappointed is an understatement - we'd won, beaten the course record and then been disqualified for missing a control beside a track which was irrelevant in terms of

the time gaps between the teams. In reality the organiser didn't have much choice - he stated in the rules that all controls must be punched and had disqualified the fastest team the previous year for the same offence. The arguments continued but luckily most people were philosophical about the outcome and things didn't get too heated.

So - a disappointing end to an exciting race, particularly for the organiser who was pretty well forced into disqualifying the top 2 teams (including his own). The relay is a good season - opener; attracting a good crowd with a variety of leg difficulties. Will it grow into the Scottish relay champs like the highly successful FRAs? I think it would have to move venue or at least for the navigation legs to change - they lose their appeal when everyone knows them! What was more worrying were the organiser's comments that runners had strayed off route, annoying landowners and jeopardising the race's future. This will always be a problem where the route is not clearly marked - hill runners will struggle to follow a descriptive route on a poor map unless it is clearly marked on the ground. Encouraging teams to recce the route is all very well but if you want them to follow a specific route, it needs to be well marked (ask Brian about Clachnaben!).

So what are we left with? A feeling of being robbed or hope for the year to come? I think the latter - Cosmics finished 4 teams and clearly laid out our stall to the other Scottish clubs for the coming season. If we turn out the people, we can threaten the team prizes in every race in Scotland - we just have to organise ourselves. For the men, does having the fastest team of 6 in February mean we can win this season's championship for teams of 4? Not necessarily, but it's a good start. Here's to more Cosmic success in 1998!

Tim Griffin.

Scottish Chicken Walk Championship No 1

The day finally came when all the Cosmic chicks and cocks travelled far down south to the first race in this years chicken walking championships. The Chapelgill Chicken Walk astounds the pluckiest chicken with its sheer steepness. Most chickens are accustomed to scanning their eyes down to investigate the tail feathers of the chicken in front, in this case the neck needed to be craned up to take into account the ever higher heather of Chapelgill.

The race started with our poultry moving at highest speed for 30 m on the flat before commencing the chicken walk.

Faithful to the tried and tested method:

- back bent double
- wings(hands) on knees
- move alternate wing/knee upwards through the heather
- lots of puffing and swearing

A few variations existed such as cock Greg who incessantly flaps his wings or cock Dan who has never learnt to chicken walk and insists on strutting up the hill at a jog. (Should this be tolerated or copied... style merchants advise?)

Halfway up the dunghill the support chicks were positioned under the erratic gaze of Steve Peacock (doesn't he know this is a chicken event?). The chief commentator chickling Rachel Armichick gave a gleeful account of the chicken walk..."why are all those chickens dressed as men and walking like chickens?"

Finally the summit of Chapelgill and all flew down in one quarter of the upward journey risking life and wing.

The Cosmics came in as the best losers (2nd) in both chicks and cocks.

Notable Chicks were:

Angela Mudgechick	1 st in
Sonia	
Catherine	
Encarna	Pollo

Notable Cocks were:

Mark Rigcockby	1 st in
Dan	4th
Tim	10th
Greg	11th
John	
Steve...twisted claw	

Then all the chickadees travelled home to the barn dance. Net result, 20 mins chicken walk, 4 mins flying, 8 hrs in the chicken coupe driving and best losers.

Greg B

No I don't have a thing about animals!

