

CONTRIBUTIONS

Ben Nevis

Saturday 6th August 2005

'Jane grabs your balls on the way down'. I wasn't quite choking on my beer but it was a shock. 'Oh yes, blokes used to do as well'. Blimey, nobody mentioned this when I sent my money off. Mind you, she must be good to grab someone's balls and overtake you.

To my horror, Jane sneaked up along side me just below half way up. Is she likely to take this opportunity to grab me ? I still can't work out how she can do it and run past. She said she was 'too knackered'. Is that like saying 'I can't be bothered', or 'I've got a headache' ? Is there something wrong with my balls ? Still the rules are, so I'm lead to believe, that balls are only grabbed on the way down.

The race was better than I thought it would be. A mile run along the road to the start of the climbing got the runners evenly spread out. From there on it was running where you could, but largely it was a long haul up to the top. Good to see supporting Toddlies on route – particularly Phil who gave Jane some water, allowing me to be momentarily ahead.

For the second half I kept up with Jane most of the way up. She got a lead just near the top. I remember running to the trig point, turning round, and she was gone. So much for having my balls grabbed. Maybe it's one of those 'Ben Virgin' rouses just to get you up and down the Ben in double quick time. If it was I fell for it, or rather I didn't fall but I got a couple of good scratches.

If you can compare the evening bash after a race to the race itself, then the Ben is hard to beat, a real classic. Running up the Ben gives you instant respect. Loads of people in town, after the race, had walked up the Ben and certainly wouldn't consider running up. They were curious. Me, I was loving it. All that drinking and bullshitting – I was in my prime. All for 2½ hours effort – what a result.

I think I'll be there next year, particularly now I'm kitted out with the essential 'Fat Face' accessories.

Thanks to Barry for that cool beer after the race, and of course the excuse to drink Champagne (his birthday). May he have another 60 healthy and prosperous years.

Rhys Watkins

Thieveley Pike

Several Harriers (and hangers on) made the short journey to Cliviger for the Thieveley Pike race, a low key event this year as it was out of the championship spotlight. Obviously most Harriers who were running that day were at the Good Shepherd.

On a fine day Alex Whitem had built up an impressive uphill lead when an unfortunate tendency to veer to the left on the final climb, along with the local knowledge of other runners, robbed him of his leading position: despite valiant efforts, overtaking a good number of runners, Alex did not manage to regain the lead, a young Rossendale Harrier out pacing him by 20 seconds at the end.

As usual, Moyra Parfitt dominated the over 60 ladies' race, winning yet another prize after a fine run.

Other Harriers were John Page and Jenny Ehrhardt - who was delighted with her mother's victory in the over 50s ladies' race. Jenny took great pains, at the awards ceremony after the race, to explain to all those present that she was collecting her mother's prize.

(Peter Ehrhardt)

“Vine-man” Challenge: Champagne, September 2005

A great opportunity to mix business and pleasure was my reaction when Andrew Bibby suggested a race through the vineyards of Champagne. Five signed up for the trip: Rhys – always keen to race abroad, though he did his best to miss this one – Richard and Jane, Andrew and myself.

The start of the weekend is best left to Uncle Barry to describe and score; but we had a good flight to Paris and drove down in the luxury of a hire car. We arrived in Epernay at 5.00 (having adjusted watches to ‘Rhys time’), set up tents in a well-maintained campsite and it was soon time for food and drink. Unlike the previous weekend’s trip to The Ben it was sunny and warm, and it was not to be pasta on a camp stove followed by a few pints of heavy. A 10 minute walk into town and we found a great restaurant – superb food including a quail salad, scallops done to perfection, a delightful custard and fruit pudding, and a drinks menu that consisted of 30 pages of Champagne. Authentically French; which pleased Jane as she speculated if the man on the table next to us was out with his mistress.

Saturday was race day, with plenty of time to register in the village of Ay as the start was not to 2.00, and plenty of opportunities for Andrew to impress us with his French. He was able to ask in a shop for safety pins, which were not supplied by the organizers, and kept referring to Rhys as “petite Bobo” – meaning not that he was cute, but had a “small injury”: his excuse for coming so far and not racing.

A field of 600 runners assembled, most opting for the 17k rather than the 30k race. The majority looked super-fit and tanned; Jane spotted one fatty that I felt confident in beating. They also had a stylish array of club vests: prompting ideas to change the design of ours. How do you spot a Brit abroad? On the beach in a string vest with, in a race wearing a drab and boring one, without even a hankie on his head.

Bobo had heard of the points that Brannie achieved by getting in amongst the elite runners at the Great North Run, but as a non-runner this was not an option. Instead he climbed onto the starters podium and rubbing shoulders with the mayor and senior race officials he took photos of the four Toddlies in the mass start.

The runners started at a surprisingly slow pace, and barely five minutes into the race as the route climbed out of town many were walking. It was cooler than the 29C of Friday, but these south facing Grand Cru vineyards in full sun were the hottest part of the course. Many runners were carrying water bottles or camelbacks and it was a long undulating run through the vines to the first drinks station. Here we were handed not the glasses of Champagne that Andrew had promised but merely water. Coming up was the “big” climb of the race, 450ft: not much of a challenge for fell runners but a daunting prospect for French walkers! Into another village, a drinks station – water again – onto some roads and into a lovely cool forest. Easy running to a signpost, -no marshal-, 30k to the right 15k (confusing) to the left. This was about halfway and the start of the long decent, nothing steep, on a footpath, then roads, then track.

Leaving the vineyards and hills, across a main road with frustrated honking drivers being held up and into the valley bottom. Good news at the drinks station, 4k to go: bad news, it was all along a canal towpath. Long and straight and exceedingly boring, but at least you could make out the finish from a long way off. Past Bobo taking more photos and as I crossed the line I heard the word “international” on the PA. Alan Greenwood, please take note!

Plenty of food and drink at the finish and then back to the campsite to shower and change for the evening do. We were under strict instructions from Jane to ‘dress smart’ to march the party dress she was to wear. So we went back to Ay for a sit down meal for 100 or so runners and race helpers. The food was again good, but the red wine ran out necessitating us to switch to drinking Champagne that, despite our best efforts, didn’t. The downside to the evening was that it included a disco, and, even worse, a disco whose

music was chosen for the pleasure (sic) of 30 Belgium runners. How their country gets the reputation for being boring when they are so enthusiastic in dancing to the Birdie Song I don't know. Jane, desperate to loose the attentions of an undertaker, was happy to help them out with all the words and actions. But even she drew the line at their mass participation dances which consisted in running around in a large circle, waiving arms in the air, totally uncoordinated, to a moronic 'disco beat'. And all this before the wine ran out.

It was an hour's walk back to the campsite, with everyone agreeing what a great time we had and it could be done again next year. The course was runnable for all abilities – the winning time was 63 minutes, the slowest 2 hours 14. (Jane was 8th FV40). It was fairly easy to get to, especially when hiring cars. If there is enough interest next year we need an extra day to visit Champagne Houses (one I know would be willing to host us) and plan to take on the Belgians at drinking and dancing. Chumbawumba should fit the bill.

But there are alternatives. By chance I met at a wine tasting the following week someone who had just done the Bordeaux marathon. Here you do get to drink at the 30 or so Chateaux you run through – including Lafite who being so poncy won't serve their wine in plastic so you are given a proper glass. There are food stalls on the way round, you can sample different cheeses or eat a steak towards the end to help you through the wall. But the ultimate challenge must be the Oyster bar – try keeping that down.

Dave O'Neill

Champagne

Weekend of 10/11th September

I catch the guy in front. With a bit more effort I think I can take him. I move out, I pass, I move back in. Nothing quite beats that moment of satisfaction. I need to keep it up. Another guy appears. I've got to take him, I'm on a roll.

I've got a slight sweat on my forehead but all in all I'm very comfortable.

According to the marker I've got 5 miles to go. For me it's in the bag. If I can only keep this pace up. I catch the guy in front and indicate to over-take...indicate ?, and then the lights change to red.

Andrew is on the mobile, 'you've got 10 minutes to get to the check-in, good luck'. I swear. I switch off the stereo. I put my foot down. Clearly I need to move out of my 'comfort zone'.

Of course I make it to Leeds airport, just in time, but thanks must go to the crack team of airport marshals. Andrew in the right spot at exactly the right time, Jane & Dave appearing from nowhere just when I've lost Andrew, and Richard stopping my van from being wheel clamped.

If luck is spooned out one portion per day, then I had used up this months allowance for all five of us. Thankfully, good preparation from Andrew, our leader, meant everything actually went to plan – other than me arriving in Todmorden one hour later than I should have – bring on those points.

Rhys Watkins

The 6 Trigs challenge (or 6 people roam about in the mist searching for 6 white posts! !)

The previous Wednesday there had been plenty of mirth and quips from other Toddlies with comments like "Imagine what time you will have to get up for breakfast! Why go to bed at all?"

Still short on the usual 'child/'work excuses I decided to join the motley crew at 5.30am. At the starting point I found Jeff (lean) Rachel (brave), Andrew (on form), Richard (mean) and Peter (fruity) and myself-hereafter known as Tufty.

As we set off (with head torches) up the tracks to Blackshawhead it felt positively balmy and I thought we were in for a gorgeous sunny day (it's amazing how delusional you can be at 5.30am!!!) After disturbing all the farm dogs in the vicinity we legged it as quickly as possible to the first trig point. We reached Bride Stones after about 1 1/2 hours and I was surprised how fresh I felt.

The sun made a pathetic attempt to rise and most of the time it was misty. I had been promised views of Blackpool tower but hey, ho-I had to settle for seeing the rest of the crew (in outline) and the odd leech!! (ask Brave about these??)

In search of the second elusive trig point we all ran in different directions (exactly what Mandy always tells us not to do! !)in deep mist. Fruity headed off confidently to the right and found the trig point.

The route between the second and third trig points seemed to go on and on. It was well boggy and my left leg kept disappearing into the smelliest bogs I also began to hallucinate about a Tetley moment!

This was not to be at the third trig point! I did notice, however, that Lean and Brave had bought up the entire organic selection from the CO-OP and a year's supply of jelly tots!! Mean kept opening his Tupperware container and getting his camera out to take unflattering shots of the rest of the crew. !?!

Lean and On form took the lead as we progressed to the fourth trig point. I lost all feeling in my hands and felt reminiscent of the mini-moorland marathon in January! There was an excessive amount of tussock bashing and thigh deep heather! Being a little short in the leg department Brave and I watched as the others became specks in the distance. Yes, we did all get lost again here as they did last year!!

After about 5 hours we all seriously began to flag ;conversation turned to grunting and moaning. One more to go and the thought of champagne kept me going!!

Finally, caring little what we looked like (note Tufty's hair!!) and walking more than running we reached the wonderful Sheepstones. (How worrying that a white stone can be seen in such a way!!) We tired of negotiating the fields down from the last trig and did a brief stint down Birchcliffe road. At this point Fruity had started to trail and we lost him completely to blackberry laden hedges. There he was having a good old feed while we were desperate to get a sit down!!

We regrouped to run the last stretch along the canal. On form still seemed to have some energy as did Lean. I was seriously pooped!!

The champagne and croissants really hit the spot after just short of 6 1/2 hours. It was tough and as a clumsy fell runner I was super smelly and wet but it was a GREAT team event. Yes ,I would do it again (when I have had a haircut!!)

Yours (about to be sued for defamation!!) Mel