

## OMM 2006 – The ‘Orrible Mountain Marathon

We were still on speaking terms with Mandy and Chris on Saturday morning. We laughed and joked about lightweight gear and how rough the terrain was going to be. “The clag’s down to the trees,” we grinned in anticipation. Steaming mugs of tea in our hands, merriment prevailed over a breakfast of muesli and luxury scones. Kitted up we strolled along the track to the start exchanging banter with fellow competitors. Surprisingly, lots of our usual arch-rivals had also entered the Long Score Class of the OMM (the reincarnation of the KIMM), including Mandy and Chris. “We should get some scalps,” we agreed, macho competitiveness kicking in even at such an early hour in the morning. And Mandy and Chris? “They’ll do well against the other womens’ teams,” we nodded sagely, but they won’t worry us. Well, they’re just girls.

We pored over the map just past the start, clock running and ears pounding with adrenaline. Just less than seven hours to go. The checkpoints apparent random scattering disguised the course setters cunning thought process. Undaunted, we pulled out our latest amazing high tech navigational gadget. Wiggling the piece of string left and right we tried to capture big points without ending up short of the midway camp. Just how far could we run in seven hours on some of the most inhospitable terrain known to man. How long is a piece of string? Ours was 20km, in relative terms, an innovative weight saving plan on my part as we’d guessed our total probable distance for the day at 40km. We’d just lay the string out twice.

It’s always nice to go straight to the first checkpoint. But, you can’t get it right every time. Having forgotten, in our enthusiasm, to look at the checkpoint description we’d missed it and negotiated several hundred yards of knee-deep swamp before realising our error. Swearing, we returned to the kite through the leg sapping morasse. And guess where the next checkpoint was? Up the hill at the other side of the accursed mire. More sapped legs, and to cap it all, Dave disappeared into the evil smelling bog up to his armpits. “Well, it can’t get much worse than this, can it!” Dave grunted. But it did.

“Do you know where we are?” we asked a passing competitor as we stood scratching our heads in the thick clag by a hilltop lochan that, by my reckoning, should have our third checkpoint next to it. “There,” he pointed, on my map. I looked sheepishly at Dave. “We’re on the wrong bloody hill”, I confessed.

Many tussocky miles later, after a short cut which resulted in us thrashing through the kind of impenetrable forest that would stop an Ent in its tracks, and half an hour wandering a barren hillside finding every small pond except the one that hid yet another water sodden checkpoint, we were religiously following our compass bearing towards the “large boulder” of the checkpoint description. “There’s the wall,” Dave shouted triumphantly, referring to the arrow like feature on our maps that we should have followed in the first place. “Where?” I replied.

“Down there, can’t you see it?” Now I know my eyes are bad but there definitely wasn’t a wall. “You’re hallucinating again” I chided, reminding him of our Mont Blanc fantasies. But, this was bad. If we couldn’t even find a wall several miles long, what chance of finding a boulder. It was at this point that we realized that both our compasses must be malfunctioning. There was obviously some strange magnetic anomaly under our feet. Even worse it appeared to be following us!

Thus, two bedraggled and demoralized figures jogged lamely down the track to the half way camp, in on time but with little in the way of points to testify to the day’s exertions. Worse news was to come. Mandy and Chris, having gone unerringly to every checkpoint they pointed their compasses at, had amassed 10 points more than us. The shame! And every competitor on the campsite seemed to know about it. The greeting, “I hear Mandy and Chris are beating you” started to jar a little after the thousandth repetition. Putting a brave face on it, we amused ourselves by blowing up our balloon beds. Honest! These were our latest weight saving innovation. Seven long balloons held together by a flimsy piece of pex fabric and, hey presto, a comfy mattress. And we could make a variety of lifelike balloon animals as well.

The second day started far more successfully. “Let’s do it!” we agreed having decided overnight that it had to be all or nothing. We dispensed with the piece of string and headed for faraway checkpoints with big points. Our strategy seemed to be working. We even found some trods we could actually run on. “Shall we go for that one as well?” We scanned our map. “We might as well, it’s not too far off our route back.” Bad move. We should have headed straight for the finish. Plagued by unrunnable ground we eventually resorted to running in the shallow water at the edge of a loch to give us a break from the waist deep tussocks we’d struggled through for the preceding hour. And we now noticed, having studied the map a little more intently, that the nice path on which we’d intended to “hammer” back to the finish, more likely resembled one of the numerous linear quagmires that masquerade as paths in the Galloway Hills. And it went over a big hill on the way. And it was 14 km to the finish. And we only had an hour left. “That’s blown it!”

Two hours and forty minutes of arduous bog bashing and tree thrashing later we ran the final 200 metres to the finish. Fortunately everyone had not yet packed up and gone home. And somehow they already knew of our predicament. Of the 380 points we’d amassed we’d blown over half in time penalties. “The girls have done well,” we were reassured by everyone we passed. “They were getting a bit worried about you...thought you’d got lost or something.” We grinned and beared it. Mandy and Chris had indeed done well, not only winning the Ladies prize but soundly thrashing us as well. It’ll be a long, long time until we live this one down. I’m still getting the phone calls, “What happened to you then???”

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