

HOT TODDY 2005

It was a few years ago – and I guess a moment of weakness – anyway it does mean I can skip a cold & hilly road race: so I said, yes, I would help organise the Hot Toddy. And that's why I was standing shivering outside the pub, one morning, just two days after Christmas, with a growing crowd gathering around. I'm not usually to be seen banging on pub doors of a morning – honest.

The calling of innkeeper is ancient and honourable, but it's not always a terribly successful one. Since we started at the White Hart in 2000, I don't think we've had the same landlord two years together. So I do tend to go in from time to time, and check they are still expecting us. And that's why I was in there about six weeks ago – just to check. 'You what? Hot Toddy? Whatever's that?'

Mmm. 'Is it not in your diary?' - well, no, it isn't, and indeed there's nothing else in the diary either, the diary's brand new. So, here we go again, I'm quite polished with my description now, as to what we want, delivered through clouds of total incomprehension – why does anybody want to get into a pub at 9 a.m. in order to run half naked around town?

And being the anxious type – some Harriers may have noticed I didn't stay after the Wednesday pack run a couple of weeks ago – I went again to check.

'Who did you make these arrangements with? Oh no, they're not here anymore'. But at least, the diary's still there, and the entry's still in it. Go through the same description again. Yes, yes – that's fine. Open the doors at 9 a.m. Tea & coffee. Unlikely to be worth offering food at that time. Fun Runners back about 11 a.m. Main race competitors coming in by noon. Hungry, thirsty, expecting their Hot Toddy drink. Lost in the mists of time. Secret recipe. Pie & peas please. Please do plenty of veggie pies. Please to collect a number from each runner for their Hot Toddy – I'll pay afterwards, depends on how many numbers you collect. Excellent, thankyou, thankyou, shake hands. Home with fingers crossed. The manager will ring tomorrow to confirm.

So, a week later, I'm there again. No, she didn't ring. Or maybe I was out. Yes, yes, all the arrangements are fine. Great, great, thankyou. See you next week.

It's the Thursday before Christmas and the phone rings. 'Hello is that Peter? It's the manager here'. And – yes, everything is just fine. Looking forward to it. Just one little thing, what with the new licensing regulations and all that. We can't let the public in before 10 a.m. No, I'm terribly sorry, but there's no way round it. We will open up for you at 10 a.m. OK, thanks then, see you next Tuesday.

Bloody hell, what if it rains?

Anyway it didn't. Just a light sprinkling of snow on the pub's outside tables, and no wind. Pleasant day in fact. Load in the Land Rover bulked up by the three chairs I hope Joyce won't miss when the family come down for breakfast. Definite change to the early routine at the pub – no carrying loads up the stairs, stand outside, jump about to keep warm, try to keep the banter going while we wait for the competitors to arrive. And aren't the Harriers wonderful? All these people who said they would come and help, roll up, all cheerful & looking forward to a good day. And the competitors turn up too. And the ink in the bios doesn't freeze. And it's almost 10 o'clock, she'll open the doors in a minute.

So 5 past 10 sees me banging on the pub door. It's not just me, though I am indeed cold. It's all the folks who need to go to the toilet before a race. Last time I banged on a pub door at Christmas is over thirty years ago. It's not becoming at my age.

Door opens – oh, thankyou, thankyou. But it's not to be. 'My cleaner's still cleaning, I'm waiting for the manager'.

We did get in at 10 15. We start the Fun Run a few minutes late to let people get out of the toilets & up to the station. No great harm done. 35 in the Fun Run – a good number. What's this? I've still got one of my instruction sheets in my pocket. Can't have handed it out. Wonder which marshall it's for? Ah – Fun Run marshall at the far end, where the runners have to be turned to come back along the canal to Todmorden. Right. Best get someone there, before the Fun Runners disappear into the mists of Littleborough.

Where the hell is he? Haven't seen him – toilet seat points, I think. Need to talk to Uncle Barry. And a damsel rode to my rescue – or rather, we drove together to Shade as my agitated and incoherent description of where I was missing a marshall was a little difficult to follow. Sorted.

And they all got their goody bags, and nobody fell in the canal, and it was a grand day, and the prizes went down OK, and we even had, as usual, one or two in fancy dress.

Now for the heaving mass of runners waiting on the car park. Actually, some are still in the toilet – the queue never ended. So again we start a few minutes late.

And they're off. And suddenly it's quite still. And we can do the Fun Run presentation. And I can get all those things out of the Land Rover up the stairs. Thanks to the multitude of helpers. And the microphone works – plugged the correct objects into the appropriate orifices. The registration wallahs say they're enjoying themselves – I think they mean their tiny hands are no longer frozen. Me – after freezing earlier, I'm glad to get a bit of fresh air, and even a bit of exercise. By some fluke manage to watch the winner come in – quite a gap before the next runners come into view. What a run.

The sticky labels don't stick. Not the ones I supplied anyway. Yet we manage an apparently accurate tabulation of results, and the presentation starts by 12 50. I don't know how they managed to get me the results so quickly. I'm of the view that it's partly to do with leaving the computer at home.

Maybe it will have to be a different venue next year? Needs to be central – I want to continue the present Fun Run, it's a good course, off road and safe. But I'll appreciate access at 9, pie & peas for them as wants, and an efficient dispensation of Hot Toddy. Though I was told it actually tasted very good. By a Fun Runner – how did she manage to get some?

Peter Ehrhardt