

Hot, hot, hot (or Ennerdale 2006)

So, the best bits about Ennerdale 2006? Well,

1. I got a tan.
2. I finished.
3. I also finished in front of the great man himself.
4. I also finished in daylight.

Heck it was hot, 25°C, but it was only 8.30am and I was still at the campsite with another 21/2 hrs 'til kick off. OMG!! Shaun, Mark, Nick and myself looked like four ghosts because of the amount of sunblock we had applied.

Three quarters of an hour later and the wagon's packed and we're off, the four of us chattering away to each other trying to mask our individual and joint dread of what we've let ourselves in for. Will the wind really be as strong as predicted, 25mph gusting to gale force? Is this a good thing - taking away the heat of the sun and cooling you down - or a bad thing - kidding you that the sun's not as strong as it really is? Will there really be no cloud cover? Will the 12 litres of carb drink/amino load we're collectively carrying be enough? Has Geoff Monk got it right as he always does, or is it a wind up and the conditions are actually going to be like the 2005 Duddon when you couldn't see the next car in the start/finish field?

And will Rooney make a substitute appearance against Paraguay? Is Gerrard the second coming?

I digress. We arrive at Ennerdale Scout Camp, a fantastic facility. Peter Bland's showing off his usual array of temping race-day specials, other Harriers and old friends alike are greeted and other familiar faces are spotted. I note the required kit list states the expected "waterproof top with hood", without a hint of self-parody.....I'm standing in a vest and shorts wringing wet on the inside.

Into the Scout 'hut' and I'm dismayed to find my pre-entry has been accepted, and a number (257) and a dibber have been reserved for me.

One more layer of sunscreen, another 1/2 litre of juice, a team photo and we're all herded into the start field. A few words from the organiser saying thanks for turning up and that the cut off times have cumulatively been extended by ten minutes. I can't help noticing several types of England head gear on the start line. And why not?

And then we're off, to Great Bourne. We're sprayed by Ennerdale Water and I can't help thinking what the wind will be like on the tops. Great Bourne comes and goes - the marshals had carried a 5l bottle of water to the top - respect! And up to Red Pike and on to High Stile and High Crag. Bloody hell it's hot! I look left and Whiteless Pike and Robinson stand majestic over Buttermere. Looking ahead at about 1 o'clock I remember thinking I could almost reach out and rest my hand in Mickledore. I get to Black Beck Tarn with Chris Preston (who tells me to enjoy myself - yeah right, Chris!?) and steal a handful of jelly babies from the marshals' shelter. It's then a slog to Green Gable and near the top, although I've been religiously sipping every 30 minutes from my platypus, I feel the first signs of cramp in my thighs. But of course, I'm not the only one.

Round Great Gable and up and onto Kirkfell, where the marshals have yet more water. Descending Joss' Gully is the first time I've been out of the wind all day. And it was then that the heat hit me and I realised that the it had just been masking the effects of the sun. At Black Sail Pass loads of clubs had support teams handing out water to anybody, which was fantastic. And half way up Pillar a young lady gave me her full bottle of chilled (how??) Lucozade Sport, which did a good job of washing down half a malt loaf.

Next up was Haycock and having beaten the cut-off here, the last one of the course, mentally I relaxed and it really was just a case of getting to the finish. Somewhere under Caw Fell I emptied the platy. I waved to Jim Smith half way enroute between Iron Crag and Crag Fell, and was almost on empty to get to this, the last summit. Just before the wood the track crossed the fast running Ben Gill, which I think I drank dry, and then I could see the car park that like Mark, in our fatigued states, mistook to also be the finish. What a pair of fools! What I said to myself when I spotted the runners in front of me turning right out of the car park towards the lake is unprintable.

It's literally all I can do to muster a half jog over the line. Some guy who looks like he should be in the front row removes my cap and squeezes two massive sponges over my head, and the water pours down my back. I have been dreaming of this from half way! Still dripping wet, I wander over to find the others and am greeted by Mandy, "Hello James, you look a bit bedraggled!". I'm thinking that's a result, because I feel much, much worse! Nick and myself are walking like 192 man out of the 118 118 adverts, much to Janine's [sp Andrew?] amusement; by comparison Joss Naylor is bounding around like a spring chicken, handing out the awards to the winners.

Tea, cake and a shower, and it's back to our campsite for a barbie, beer, wine and oblivion. Can't wait for next year!.....

James Riley



Four of Tod's finest at Ennerdale, Yes, they look cheerful enough... but that was before the race... Below, James Riley six and a half hours later.

