

So...why do you still run for Tod Harriers then?

I have had writing this in mind for a long time but typically never quite found the time to voice my thoughts. However, given recent events and various discussions that seem to be going on, now seemed like a good time.

In an attempt to make this more readable for you there is a quiz. Now you are excited I can tell...it's a guess the Toddie as you go along.

Summit pub year 2000

I had just changed jobs and on my first day I met a Tod Harrier(1) who, on finding out I did a bit of running did not give me any choice in the matter but to get myself up to Summit pub that very evening for a pack run. It was about time that something improved in our lives. I had a lonely previous year around the tracks of Littleborough and the Rochdale canal (running I mean, in case it sounds like I was homeless) whilst Mark lamented his loss of his Sheffield climbing circle and did pull-ups on the doorframe before cracking open (yet another) lonely beer. Worried that at this rate we would a: have no friends and b: end up divorcing before we'd even made it up the aisle, I turned up that very evening. Having cunningly mentioned to Mark that sometimes climbers also go running, he came along too.

We had a great run out on the tops, off quietly (before all the social we found ourselves in the pub with couple (2) who made us so welcome and the KIMM, mountain biking, the about the pubs in the area) that we were about to get better.

So I started running and Mark blue book –like other 'little books' who might be up for it - sadly we had moved to Rochdale. He 'coathanger' shoulders (3), the venture far from t'valley (4) the school (5) and an unlikely climbing half her age(6) and thought his luck



and then before we could sneak interaction became too much) an impossibly enthusiastic AND mentioned climbing, (oh Ben, and a quick rundown began to feel that maybe things

pursued 'potential ' for his little this is one you fill with people empty of new numbers since eagerly eyed up the bouldering bloke who wouldn't teacher from that posh clever classy lady who looked about was in.

The next couple of years were subsequently much brighter – Mark out on the rocks, and me out doing fell-races I would never dared enter on my own. But more important than that we had some great nights out with some lovely, kind, funny, entertaining people. Several dour grumpy old sods too (7-10) but they make life more interesting too don't you think. We also learnt some interesting dance moves (11), got our roof fixed without charge on the day it started leaking (12), managed to get a pint or 2 out of the coathanger (a miracle by all accounts), ran up the largest sand-dune in Scotland, and narrowly avoided camping in the biggest puddle at Coniston as someone kindly got their tent there first(13).

So it was with mixed feelings that Mark accepted a job away – we were lured by the Lake District obviously (even the bouldering bloke makes it up here sometimes you know) – but Todmorden had made a big imprint on my heart especially.

2003 - 'You'll join a new club up there of course, but we'll still see you at races'.

I started running with the local club here in Kendal when we moved here. I think I expected, and was hoping for a similar welcome to that first night with Tod. But the weeks went on and I kept going running and everyone is very nice and friendly BUT nobody asked me if I wanted to join the club and even more strangely –*there is no going to the pub after a run!* I began to realise Tod H has something special going on.... Even more so when I learnt there are 2 clubs in Kendal that result from a split of opinion about 10 years ago that never got resolved – the backbiting and repercussions seem to continue to this day. The result of this is you have 2 small clubs with very few women out racing from either and lots of good lady fell-runners who live in Kendal or around but run for other Lake District clubs. The situation with the men is similar too and unfortunately I don't think it is one that is likely to improve.

I contemplated joining one of the Lake District teams, but they are invariably quite small and full of mostly more serious runners. Certainly when I was coming back from having the boys there was no way I could have turned up on one of their running nights and then that made me think do I really want to join a club like that?

The great thing about Tod H for me is that I have always felt like a member of a team, a club, part of a camaraderie that is present whether I am running at my best or coming nearly last or even being flown off the fel I in a helicopter. We each have our good years and our bad years in terms of racing success and that is the same for the club as well. What matters more to me (and I think to most people in the club) is that we are there to support each other, enjoy running, have a laugh and a beer and keep looking forward to the next race or challenge whatever that may be.

I am full of admiration for so many people in the club – those that have achieved the BG, that have got back to running from injury/illness/even a bloody heart bypass, and in particular those that give time to organising us and races. I have never been made to feel guilty for not helping out at races, turning up for committee meetings etc which I believe is also quite a common feature of some of the clubs around here. (Obviously I do and should feel guilty and this is something I will endeavour to rectify in the future!)

Since we have moved up here we have still felt involved with the club – we've been on holidays to the Alps and Scotland; been invited on several others even with a newborn and toddler coming along; had fantastic camping weekends and been to some great Christmas dos. Whenever we are back in Tod or HB we have a great time. We have even been invited back since we infected half the Harriers with a sickness bug.

Most of the races I have done up here have had other Toddiess running or cheering people on. We won the Ladies team prize at Coniston and Borrowdale this year – not something I would have expected at all but a testament to the club that 'turns out and does it' where others do not.

So in answer to the question at the beginning, that I am occasionally asked, is that I sometimes WISH Kendal had a club as fantastic as Tod H that I could become involved in and a part of.....but quite simply it doesn't and so I haven't.

Thanks for still having me!

Ali Richards

Quiz answers – see me at the Christmas Do if you're stuckbut it's fill in your own for 7-10!