

Another Toddie Virgin Looses It

“The hardest event in the Tod calendar” claimed Rhys “it’s grim, really grim.” Doubts emerged in my mind, should I really be doing it? I counselled other Toddies: many had opinions, some very strong, many were happy to criticise – none had actually participated. I decided I had got get it over and done with. It may be bloody but now’s the time. Just lie back and think of England.

It would be hard. Grin and bear it was the advice. Its character forming, it’s been known to bring out the best in people – but more often it has brought out the worst. I steeled myself for the disapproval and derision that was sure to come. Does Kiki have a helpful view on things as bizarre as this? Too late, my name is on the list. I’m about to be initiated.

With a reputation for the extreme it’s an event shrouded in more myth than the mist that descends around it. Is participation in it really such a closely guarded secret? Often referred to, little understood. Those who have done it hardly talk about it. Part of fell runners modesty I thought, but then again it could be a need for anonymity. I was about to find out which.

The day came and an elite band of Toddies lined up for the start. John and the two Daves looked to be old hands – would their inside knowledge help me through. I guessed that they knew the course well but should I stick with them or try to make an immediate impression, strike out on my own with my own ideas of how to run it. We jostled for position at the start and then were off. I eventually fell in behind the others and was glad that I did.

The first part was easier than expected. Smoothly I got into my stride and things seemed to fall into place. Then without realising it I was confronted with the start of the problems – it now became a long uphill struggle. No sense of relief, no sense of achievement. This was like wading through treacle, I was glad others were breaking the trail and setting the pace. How can some people voluntarily do this year after year?

This was slow going; unforgiving, relentless. My mind was getting muddled, progress was reduced to a ‘tick list’ one objective at a time, then refocus on the next. Then suddenly I was confronted with a choice, which way to go? I hesitated, looking around. What were other people doing? Luckily there seemed to be a consensus emerging and I headed with them. Relief; it looked to be a good decision at the time, but then I had doubts – how will it be viewed after the finish when the post mortem is conducted?

Myself and Mel spotted a short cut onto the road – only to be ticked off by a particularly insistent Marshall (obviously a fell lover) telling us that we must include another trail checkpoint. Dutifully we retraced our steps and finally found one. I was cheered by the appearance of Andrew offering drinks – a choice of red or white.

We came to a particularly tough section, I was not quite sure where we were going. A horrible feeling came over me – haven’t we been here before. We’ve lost our way. But after going round in circles a couple of times we found another alternative and moved on. I looked at my watch, must be halfway now. The tedious road section was out of the way, just the fell to finish and we would be home and dry.

The end was in sight – the final short fell race was slotted into the calendar. I’ve made it. A feeling of relief and euphoria flooded over me. I’ve managed to help choose the Harriers Grand Prix races. Yes, I know this meeting was the easy bit – the carping of the critics yet to come. And yes I know the old timers will be shaking their heads in disbelief at how easy I’ve had it, reminiscing on how long, painful and difficult it used to be when the likes of Parky and Branny battled it out. But I’m proud of what I’ve done for the club.

Will I be doing it next year? Well, it wasn’t as bad as I was led to expect. And I haven’t been ostracised at pack runs or harangued on the e-group for the choice of races – yet! But could I see myself as a selector alongside Stuart who would be giving us his opinion on races that he never wants to do again. Now surviving THAT would be the ultimate challenge.