

ISLE of JURA FELL RACE 2007 - Sponsored by The Isle of Jura Distillery



“What a fantastic event!”

That’s the comment we get from everyone we bump into about this year’s Jura race (they’re usually proudly wearing a fast fading T-shirt). In our second year organizing the race we managed to lay on the best weather for nine years. And, even better, I got to run – it was Mandy’s turn to be Race Director on the day. She did a great job at Race Control, so good in fact that I suggested she should do it every year – her reply is unprintable!

I hope you all enjoyed the race as much as I did, it was great to get a view from the Paps and it seemed to make for a close race up front with Ian Holmes just beating Lloyd Taggart, with our fellow Todmorden Harrier Jon Wright having a great run to clinch 3rd place. A big thank you to Donald Ewan Darroch and his team of marshalls who had an easier job this year compared to most when it’s often a battle against wind and clag just to get to the summits to check you all through. They could actually wave to each other from the summits this year. And thanks to Glasgow Raynet who provided the flawless comms system – they’re plotting some kind of big screen at base next year so that supporters can see who’s passed through each checkpoint! Watch this space.

Apologies for the slight detour across Islay but this was unfortunately just one of those things. We were lucky with the weather and enjoyed a pleasant cycle both ways but I know some of you got slightly damp. We’re assured that the Port Askaig pier will be ready for next year’s race!

The junior races seem to get more popular every year, this year we had over 80 youngsters competing to get one of the coveted T-shirts. I think the kids look forward to the races more than the senior runners. I know of one chap who wasn’t going to come to Jura this year but his 6 year old lad put him right. “Yes, Dad, we’re going, I want to do the race again so you’d better get the ferry booked.” We last saw them cycling back towards Islay, young Tom proudly wearing the 2007 T-shirt. “I slept in it” he assured us.

The island seemed to be full of celebrities this year. Not just legendary fellrunner Holmes, and numerous previous winners and race organizers, but also the well known author Will Self had taken up residence at the distillery Lodge. “You’re Will Self”, I said in a statement of the bleedin’ obvious as he strolled down to the cooperage before the race. “So who are you then?” he stared down at me from his lofty height. Having explained that I was the assistant to Race Director, Mandy Goth, he proceeded to interview me “for this programme I’m doing for the BBC”. He asked me why we ran over the hills, and what we experience when we’re doing it. I regaled him with how we were just simple mountain loving folk who liked a challenge. ...and, “How do you run down mountain precipices?” he asked, “is it true that you windmill your arms to slow yourselves down?” Where did he get that impression? We’d all look a tad demented if we raced down the scree off pap three windmilling our arms. You’d have someone’s eye out! I’m going to check it out at the next race; have we any closet windmillers out there? I pondered the question, looked puzzled and quoted Jos Naylor’s “reading the stones” advice. I dread to think what else I rambled on about. I’m not sure I’m looking forward to hearing my broad Lancashire musings on Radio 4.

But, as for my picture on the front cover of GQ magazine. Now that is something to look forward to! Mark Russell, Chief Sub Editor of GQ, still turned up for the race despite his gruelling fell running baptism at the Achille Ratti hut in Langdale in February. We’d already warned him that the steep smooth curves of the Paps belied their rugged exterior and he confessed that he winced as he got his first close up view of the Paps on Friday, hardly believing their grand scale. But, with the encouragement of race guides Chris and John Preston he completed the race. A great effort for someone in their first ever fell race – we look forward to his article in GQ.

You may well get to see yourselves on video if you were at this year’s race. I’ve heard that footage is likely to be posted on YouTube, and local, Scott Tait, was filming a video of the days events for the distillery website. We’ll post links on www.jurafellrace.org.uk when available.

Our passions in life are fellracing and mountaineering. And we enjoy a dram or two of good malt whisky. So, it didn’t take much to persuade us to become the organizers of one of the toughest fell races in Britain, sponsored by one of the best whisky distilleries in the world. Spending a week in such a friendly and stunningly beautiful place seems to get more pleasurable each year. We’d like to extend our special thanks to everyone on the island who make all of us feel so welcome...and to the Jura Distillery for their generous sponsorship of the race... and to all the locals who put in a lot of behind the scenes effort to help make the race the grand occasion that it always is... the camping field, the sumptuous grub, the beer and banter in the hotel, the pipe band, and the ceilidh. They make it a very special race in the hearts of fellrunners, many of whom return every year for their annual injection of Jura hospitality. We’re looking forward to next May already. See you all there.

Slainte

Mandy Goth & Phil Hodgson