

My Trip to Black Hell (Coombe)-March 2008.

I have been trying to catch the "fell-running bug" for a while. Others can do it, why can't I? I quite enjoyed the Trog and so thought-2008 could be the year I really get the bug-I realise now the lovely weather and modest hills of Yorkshire had a good deal to do with it!!

Phil and Mandy kindly drove up to the Lakes-I volunteered to sit in the middle, hoping some of Kath's fast descending and Rhys' stamina might rub off!! I tried to gain as many "tips" from the carload of seasoned fellrunners as possible. I still panicked, however, when we registered and splashed out on a proper Pete Bland map of the route with compass bearings on. Although I felt more prepared at the time, it was as less use than a piece of loo paper as it was far too windy and wet to read it at all!!

We set off (what's new) in a muddy field-I was fine with this but could see the steep hill ahead (deep intake of breath at what others had described "as the short hill which you don't really count"). As I climbed on all fours, the horrors of the Duddon Disaster I had done last Summer came flooding back!! My hands hurt (from all the Innovates and Walshes which had trodden on them!!), my legs were burning and most people had past me-even the black jelly baby struggled to lift my despondency.

Still the start was a breeze(literally) compared to the long steep climb to come, the driving hailstones, 70mph winds and frozen hands. It is, without doubt, the worst couple of hours I have ever spent but I did finish (unlike certain well known local runners I was not disqualified!). When I finally emerged from the wind, cheese and onion pie has never tasted so good!

I have nothing but awe, admiration, respect and a little envy for all those who ran well and some who even enjoyed it!!(nuts!!). Still I did learn a lot and am determined to do better-Chris has very kindly promised to take me back to Black Coombe on a better day!! Before I do, however, there are an A-H of things I will make sure I do (I appreciate this is stating the obvious to all you experienced fellrunners and I apologise-just make sure I do these and I might finish with a smile on my face!!)

A- Always recce!! I had never been to Black Coombe or the surrounding area. Those who had recce had a real advantage at the Summit as they knew the line to take to descend, whilst I stood on the top (with a group of 10 or so other hopeful souls waiting for inspiration!) Thanks to those long suffering souls who went round the route of Midgley Moor .

B- Beware sunny starts (especially if worse weather forecast!)"Oh its only an hour or two !" I thought as I set off in shorts above the knee and thin base layer. As we climbed up the weather closed in-the hailstones made it difficult to see the next person in front and the wind made it hard to stand up!. I was frozen. I was so cold (especially my hands!) that I could not do up my bum bag and had to run down with the contents-water, water-proofs, ap etc in my hand. Well that's my excuse for the super-slow descent anyway!!

C- Climb up straight. All fours is a very bad idea, unless you like bruised hands! I need to learn to climb up the slope, not side to side. So next time you see me on an ascent I will be chanting" Can climb, will climb straight up!!"

D- Do not wait until the top to put your waterproof on. At the top it was far too windy-I spent ages grappling with my waterproof. Eventually I gave up and tied it round my neck like a sail. Afterwards someone gave me a top tip-get the waterproof ready to put on in your bum bag so zip is done up, right way out etc. Doh!! Why didn't I think of that!!

E- Expect the unexpected!! More of the same I guess. I am just glad I didn't attempt the Edale Skyline last year in the snow and driving winds! Still my next fell experience cannot be as bad!

F- Fresh legs. I should have known better-I treated Black Combe as my weekend run. I didn't taper at all-I had still run 3 times earlier in the week-including speed training and a double PE session at school. So in the week before the Three Peaks I need to be carried everywhere in a sedan chair!!

G- Get going. This is a note to myself really. When most people start passing me I need to dig deep and try to keep close to them, rather than giving up and walking! I would learn from their uphill technique too!

H- Hurrah and Hug someone!! plan to do this whenever I finish a fell race (so watch out!!) and, of course, like Claire suggested, enjoy a large glass of wine!!

So here's to my improving as a fell runner in 2008(despite Black whatever!!)and catching the "fell running" bug!!

Mel Blackhurst