

## AbOMMinable Borrowdale

Fame at last! You probably heard about us on the BBC. We were two of the 1700 lost souls, reported as missing in action on the wild Cumberland fells in the mountain marathon from hell. Our epic story began early that morning...

My underpants provided little bodily protection from the wind whipping down the valley. "Hold on tight" I shouted to Mandy and Sue as they attempted to sit on two corners of a flysheet with a life of its own. Don't ask how I ended up in a "threesome" with the top Toddies lady team...needless to say Mandy wouldn't let me sleep in the middle! It was 5.30am on a dark, cold and windy Saturday morning. The event hadn't even begun yet. We'd been rudely awoken by a loud flapping noise as the freshening wind prised a tent peg free. Clad only in crocs and jocks I'd gallantly dived out to sort it out. But, as I replaced one tent peg, two more would pop out at the other side. I was dashing backwards and forwards in the dark like an animated lighthouse, headtorch beam searching for pegs catapulted skywards by the caving canvas. Goose pimples were forgotten as I battled to regain control. The ripping noise signalled defeat. With flysheet in tatters all we could do was take turns at sitting on our belongings, heaped on the grass below the stars, while the others pulled on some clothing and packed sleeping bags and mats as best they could as unexpected objects whistled past us, sucked out from under the flysheets of other tents by the manic wind. "Have you seen the car key?" Mandy asked. "It was in the tent pocket" I replied, heart sinking. The inner tent had done a wild dance before finally collapsing around Mandy's ears and the car keys were no longer in the pocket. Having packed all our kit we now frantically unpacked it. Our running gear for the imminent OMM was in the car. Having scoured the grass surrounding our demolished tent the key finally turned up in my kitbag, scooped up when rescuing clothes in the melee. We headed for Wilf's and a well deserved bacon butty and brew.

Our pre-dawn tent crisis on the Saturday morning provided an insight into how events of the day might unfold. For the first few hours the wind and rain were intermittent and nothing like the torrential rain and 110mph blasts anticipated by the MWIS forecast. I was running with Oz Kershaw and we'd made good progress from the start at Seathwaite, over Allen Craggs to Esk Hause. The wind, funneling through Ore Gap, abated as we descended towards Eskdale. The boggy ground round Burnmoor Tarn was even soggy than usual and we were glad of the wooden footbridge over the raging river at Wasdale Head. Heads down we ploughed up to Beckhead. Just as I was about to say to Oz, "Don't know what happened to the high winds?" we turned onto Moses Trod and felt the full brunt of the impending gale, bearing down on us from the north. We battled to the next checkpoint, conveniently located in the middle of a stream junction. What would normally be two gentle streams now looked like grade 5 rapids with two white water cascades meeting in a violent maelstrom. Risking a likely terminal thrill ride we punched the checkpoint and escaped onto the hillside. Well, what should have been a hillside. It was now just a sheet of flowing water. Despite the relentless drenching rain, and a wind that was throwing us about like paper puppets, we were in high spirits. It's not often that you see waterfalls flowing up into the sky, testament to the brutish force of the storm. Bing Crosby sprang to mind as we splashed our way across the fells, although this was definitely not the place to put a broly up!

The next checkpoint was yet another hard to find re-entrant. "I've spotted it", I shouted to Oz above the incessant noise. "Down there", I pointed. I could see two checkpoint kites, the red and white markings standing out from the green and brown heather. Oz got there first. "Check the letters before you punch" I called. "Make sure we've got the right one." Oz looked up, a grin on his face. "It's E W E" he laughed, "You need some glasses". The two sheep, with red brands on their backs, sauntered down the hill. We found the real checkpoint round a knoll. There was one more to go before we reached the mid-way camp. Unfortunately there was a river in our way which was attaining Mississippi-like proportions. "It looks shallow over there", I pointed. As we reached the edge we met Mandy and Sue weighing up the option of a quick drowning against a long walk upstream. "We'll get you across" we boasted. Linking arms, Oz went first. The water roared past as we edged out, knee deep...thigh deep...waist deep. Oz called a halt. "The current's too strong here". We tried again 50m further up river where it had formed a wide lagoon. The flow was stronger than it looked but at waist deep didn't seem too bad. Suddenly Oz ducked down. I thought he was having a joke but the look on his face as he submerged to neck level and headed downstream suggested otherwise. I lunged out, grabbed his arm and pulled him back. "There's a deep hole" he spluttered as we resigned ourselves to trekking upstream. Eventually, safely across where the river braided, we legged it down the path, itself now resembling a river, towards the finish. "Whoa there" the marshal flagged us down as he hammered down the track. "No need to run, the event's been cancelled." Somewhat deflated we perked up when we visualised a nice warm Ratti hut and a pint or three in the Old DG. If we leg it over Honister to the car we can be in Langdale for 7pm we mused. It was not to be. The warm hut became a draughty barn, with 400+ fellow residents, no bar and a BBC interview team. Without a can of beer between us all we were well and truly lost. But what an experience, I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

**Phil Hodgson**