

Todmorden Harriers – 30th Anniversary

So, what happened in 1978? ... synthetic human insulin was invented, cellular mobile phones were introduced, the average house price was £14,000, the world's first test tube baby was born in the UK...and Todmorden Harriers & Athletic Club was formed by a small group of enlightened Todmordenites. A great year indeed!

What were you doing 30 years ago? Hmmm, 1978...that takes me back... as Tod Harriers was being born I was hitch hiking to Kathmandu through Iran and Afghanistan; not a trip I'd care to repeat in current geopolitical circumstances. It's a long way from Kathmandu to Todmorden and it took me 18 years to get here in a roundabout sort of way...but that's another story.

The original founders included a number of well respected local athletes including Harry Clayton, Eric Stuttard, Graham Wrench, John McDonagh, Derek Barker & Peter Waterhouse. Graham is one of the original founders who have lived to see Tod Harriers recent rise to prominence in fell running and he continues his close involvement with the club by coaching us, every Tuesday night, in the finer arts of speedwork,...and pain. I'm sure all our founders would have been proud of their legacy; a club which is not only thriving in terms of performance and a growing number of members but in a diversification of sporting disciplines. "More than just a running club..." is fast replacing the widely used "drinkers with a running problem" as our unofficial motto. Although fell and road running are the core activities we have more and more members attempting, and often excelling at, alternative sports such as triathlon, cycling, climbing, ultra races, and...extreme liloing!

Todmorden was the birthplace of two Nobel prize winners (one for splitting the atom), numerous professional musicians, artists, authors and sportspeople, and John Kettle the weatherman, (and it was the place where Dr Harold Shipman first practiced - did you know that a German translation of Todmorden means "death-murder"). And, although it now sits fully in Yorkshire, the boundary with Lancashire once went straight through the middle of the town hall. Together with its close neighbour, Hebden Bridge, it forms the centre of the universe as far as Todmorden Harriers are concerned. It's surrounded by wild moorland, has probably the best network of public footpaths in England, is dissected by numerous quiet country roads, has a year long programme of relatively local fell and road races, great mountain biking, a skyline dominated by Stoodley Pike, numerous excellent pubs, boasts many sightings of UFOs (usually after the pubs have shut!), and, including the surrounding areas, it's home to many enthusiastic, and talented runners and colourful characters.

The club itself has one or two such characters in its midst. There's the current Club President Jim Smith and his partner in crime Tony Shaw. Both were awesome performers in races like Wasdale and Ben Nevis in their prime and Jim, who still competes at the age of 69, sums up their philosophy as: "We can't run, but we've shifted a few pints". Then there's the inimitable Mandy Goth, Club Chairwoman since time immemorial and the ex social secretary of CAMRA, and Uncle Barry – an uncanny lookalike for the chap who swam across a bay quicker than the pouring of a pint of Guinness...there seems to be a common thread emerging? All in all we're a diverse group boasting people from many walks of life but every one with our own individual passion for running and, although we have one or two far flung members in Australia and Wales we take great pride that most members actually live somewhere near Todmorden and regularly turn out on our weekly pack runs, speedwork sessions, races, and social events.

Our Wednesday packruns are from a different pub each month. The two criteria used to determine which pubs we use are obviously: good running and good beer. All abilities catered for and you're guaranteed a warm welcome. And, as variety is one of the spices of life we occasionally liven up the Wednesday packruns with RAIDruns (runs to amazing and interesting destinations). Batman is regularly out on the moors at night with fellow Tod Batties with headtorches – they're already looking forward to the imminent annual Halloween and Guy Fawkes batruns (usually involving outrunning

wayward fireworks!). Simon's annual Pendle coach trip has become legendary, particularly in coach surfing circles (especially difficult when the coach doesn't turn up).

We have a well attended Grand Prix race series and in recent years we've steadily moved up the English championship fell running rankings and have had numerous mountain marathon and Bob Graham successes. 2008, our 30th year, has been our most successful year, with the number of members approaching the two hundred mark and yet more great performances in championships, races and relays. And we've had lots of fun doing it - our greatest strength remains the informality of the club and not taking ourselves too seriously - although sometimes it does take on Shankly proportions: "some people say that running's a matter of life and death, ...but it's much more important than that".

If you want to know more there's lots of info on our website. See: www.todharriers.co.uk



Our 30th Anniversary was celebrated at the end of June with a 30km run around the Todmorden boundary. Colin Duffield had plotted an excellent Tour of Todmorden (that sounds like a race in the making?) and on a day of mixed weather over 60 Harriers joined in at some point to run round the moors surrounding the town before meeting up afterwards to toast the occasion at the Sportsmans pub – a great little hostelry on the road above Bridestones. In true Tod Harriers style everyone there received a specially brewed anniversary ale in club colours and further partying continued into the early hours with an evening of acoustic entertainment at a camping barn just below Stoodley Pike. I'm already looking forward to our 40th celebrations – a 40 mile run followed by karaoke perhaps? And maybe a club whisky should be commissioned? (Jura malt of course!)

Phil Hodgson