

# The Old Counties Top 2008

## *The Battle of the T-Shirts*

### Early 2005.....

Do I look like I've got NUTTER written on my forehead? A 37 mile race in the Lake District. My face probably looked real blank, and rightly so. Where do these races come from? What was it again?, and it was how far? Richard (Leonard) took my stuttering refusal well. He'll find somebody else he replied – err like yep I think you're going to struggle there mate, is what I thought. Who's mad enough to do that kind of race.

It was the same evening that too many people mentioned going to the Achille Ratti hut that weekend. Am I going too? - 'am I going where?, to what?', I thought. I really wanted to ask 'what is this Achille Ratti stuff', but clearly everyone else knew about it. Me, I was struggling pronouncing it.

I was perplexed. Alarm bells were clanging loud and frantically. For the first time I felt an undercurrent within the club – some strange, like unusual, subgroup was rearing its head. I was clearly out of my depth. Retreat and regroup.

In the safety of my home I fired up the computer. I checked out Achille Ratti first. This was tough as I could only just pronounce it never mind spell it. Google's 'I think you really mean this...' helped big time.

The club is full of Catholics, I immediately thought. Not really my scene but with having a Christian up bringing I was fine with this. In fact I was relieved that it wasn't anything else more sinister. I actually have little idea of the religion of fellow Toddies – to me it matters not.

There remained only one question, why would Richard think I would be remotely interested in running a 37 mile up and down the fells in the lakes. Not only that but he would murder me – not literally, but he is faster on the fells than me. No thinking about it, as lovely as the guy is, he probably would have murdered me on route somewhere. That was close.

### Since then.....things move on.....

Last year Dave (Makin) saw me wearing the previous years Old Counties Top (OCT) t-shirt. He slapped me on the back and said 'well done – good effort - that's a tough one'. At the time it felt genuine, and to get a compliment off Dave felt great. Moments later I explained that I actually got it for helping out marshalling. I think he already knew but he played up being disgusted – 'if you didn't finish it you shouldn't be wearing it' is his motto.

For a newbie to fell running, as I was, I would have happily worn any fell running t-shirt. The harder the race the better. I just wanted people to know that I was now a Fell Runner. Not any normal runner, and certainly none of this road jogging stuff. Yep, 'I run up hills' is what I wanted people to know.

I remember when I got that OCT t-shirt. Wearing it down at the New Dungeon Ghyll that same evening. I felt that I had 'earned' it by helping out marshalling on the furthest out post of Old Man of Coniston for a few hours. Richard and the other competitors were there, but he wasn't wearing the OCT t-shirt. Sadly he hadn't finished, hence no t-shirt. He had clearly tried hard but he and his partner got timed out (I think). I felt awkward with this. My effort against his effort and I've got the t-shirt – didn't seem right to me.

It was all adding up. I simply had to do the race. This year I was disappointed that Richard had already found a partner. For me Richard and the OCT go hand in hand. It seems strange in a way that a few years ago I was thinking he'll have to find someone else, to now thinking I really want to do it with Richard. In the end Richard was able to run the race with me. Although he'll still murder me.....and I was doing the Fellsman the week before. This has the ingredients of being tougher than tough.

Richard and I had a cracking run and finished in style. However, the best bit was wearing my new OCT t-shirt down at the New Dungeon Ghyll that same evening. I felt that I had 'earned' it by running the race. Richard was there too, with his OCT t-shirt. It felt great. We had both put in the effort and both got the same t-shirt – the right balance had been restored.

To top the weekend we stayed at that Achille Ratti hut in the Langdales. I am now a member of this club, together with that subgroup of Toddies. I'm not Catholic, but it's a great club, the welcome is big and genuine, and it's full of superb people.....and the Achille Ratti put on the OCT Fell Race. If you think it's all a bit of a small world then you should know that Arthur Daniels is the organiser of the Race (as well as being hut warden) – and he's also a Toddy.

