

Borrowdale fell race 2014, or...An unexpected swim

The weather was as forecast, wet, windy and generally horrid with threat of lightning. Starting the race off, Scoffer promised there would be no lightning, but he also promised that no walkers would be out as they would have more sense; in the latter he was wrong.

As 300 runners left the starting field I asked myself what I was doing among them. Last year I thoroughly enjoyed the 17 miles of the Borrowdale fell race, but I knew this year was going to be much harder. I'd been sorely tempted to stay at home and had been trying to come up with excuses not to start, but, with advance entry only, that would have been a waste of a tenner!

Disappointingly I did not see any other CFR vests in the crowd. There was however a lone DAC purple and gold (Ian is planning to award himself a club male fell runner championship prize). I wasn't feeling particularly fit and, after the steep climb up to Bessyboot, found the traverse along Glaramara something of a trial in the conditions: wind and rain with everything underfoot either slippery or soggy. All possible channels down the slopes were full of rushing water and it was crossing one of these that I nearly came to grief. Due to the mud and weeds I failed to see what turned out to be an apparently bottomless hole into which I plummeted up to my armpits before being able to grab some grass and reeds. Instinctively I cried out for help and fortunately Ian immediately ahead and the runner behind were not far away; they stopped and pulled me out. I suppose I'd have managed on my own? I suppose..... A bit scary really. I don't think that's what they mean by "wild swimming". A side effect of this was that the jelly babies carefully placed for easy access in my shorts pocket now began to turn to slime and were no use at all for refuelling; fortunately the Mars bar wrapper was sealed up so my chocolate survived for later.

I wasn't really enjoying myself at all and at least part of me was sorry not to be timed out at Esk Hause. Soon afterwards, the boulders on Scafell Pike proved to be lethally slippery; it would have been so easy to break a leg that I felt obliged to slow right down at this section and felt a bit of a wimp. I had trouble finding the marshals and dibbing point due to the emergence from the clag of a large group of charity walkers all brandishing walking poles who got between me and the summit; Ian and the marshals actually had to shout for me. On the way down the scree I had an unpleasant fall but did not realise until later that I had ripped the "unbreakable" Sportident bracelet off my wrist and lost my dibber. I was more concerned with my scrapes and bruises at the time but I washed the blood off in the next beck that poured across the path, and a Saltwell Harrier miraculously returned the dibber to me before the next checkpoint! Result: a saving of £25 for a replacement.

The Corridor Route resembled a series of waterfalls and it was here that someone fell off - by the time I reached the scene a number of people had scrambled 100 or so feet down the hillside and were supplying first aid, so I just checked that the casualty had been reported before continuing on. (According to the online news, and by the time you read this I'm sure much more info will have been available, Bowland MRT was in the area for another event, which explains why the chap to whom I spoke was equipped with a radio, very lucky for the casualty. It was reported that Wasdale and Duddon MRTs also attended and the air ambulance lifted a "seriously injured" runner to hospital.)

After some more steep ascents that seemed a lot harder than I remembered, and ticking off Gable, the hard work was over; the only other significant ascent being Dale Head. That would be relatively easy because there would be no further time pressure, and it's familiar. However, it was not a foregone conclusion that I would get that far, because the Honister Pass checkpoint is also a timeout and the cutoff time was fast approaching. A splashy run across Grey Knotts followed by a slightly reckless descent - I had time to notice that the heather was beginning to bloom, lovely - got me to the Pass checkpoint with only one minute to spare (three quarters of an hour later than in 2013, oh dear).

Last year I had managed to pass a few people going up Dale Head, still feeling pretty good at that point. It was clear that on this occasion there would be no repeat of that achievement as I was struggling, but knew that, barring accidents, I would finish, so at last began to feel quite positive.

Dropping steeply down to Dale Head Tarn I overtook quite a few people, which is always cheering, and by this time the sun had come out, equally cheering. Disappointingly there was to be no fun fording of the river at Rosthwaite, as we were directed over the bridge instead. It turned out that the stepping stones were completely submerged so the water must have been really quite deep. Not that I could have got much wetter.

At 5 hours 37 I took 31 minutes longer than last year, but considering the conditions wasn't too disappointed with this, since from time to time I had had serious doubts about finishing. We were even back in time to watch the prize giving. As for next year- well, we'll see!

-Anna Blackburn