

## Welsh 1000m Peaks Race 2004 - No Speeding on the Snowdonia Hills

After having what I felt were legitimate excuses for the past few years as to why I never took part in the race, this year I decided to give it a go. Having taken part in a number of long distance events previously and knowing the physical and mental anguish that was involved, I felt that it would be selfish if I didn't give others the opportunity to share in this. I therefore set about convincing a few colleagues that they would enjoy the challenge and suggested that we enter a team from our workplace- North Wales Police. In all seven members of the Force entered the B section; Bob Hind, Neil Coppack, Liam O'Brien, Mark Hobson, Graham Williams, Aled Eynon and myself.

This was not however the first time that the Force has entered a team, indeed the team event in the B class was won in 2003 by NWP. Training had been going well and I felt relatively confident of doing well on the day, I have spent many days in Snowdonia and felt as though I knew most of the course well enough to make navigation a side issue (little did I know!).

The morning of the event was fine down at Aber although we were aware of a low cloud base in the hills. At the start there a small group started running strongly through the village, led by Bob Hind (who went on to win the event). Also in this group was an overweight black Labrador dog, that stayed with the pack until well on the way to the falls. This dog obviously had designs on doing well and must have singled out Liam at registration and bit him on the leg.

Once up Aber falls the leading pack split- some crossed the river straight away and headed for the Beras, whilst others (including Elizabeth Hawker who went on to finish second) stayed alongside the Afon Goch. I went with the group heading for the Beras, we soon started to pass those from the early start and climbed further into the mist. All too soon though I found myself in a position where I could not see anyone else at all, still feeling confident that I was heading the right direction I continued to run. The fact that I was running downhill didn't cause me too much concern at first as I recalled a slight downhill from Bera Bach onto the plateau towards Yr Aryg. However, I soon began to feel that this had been more than a *slight* downhill as I started to drop out of the mist. I worked out I had descended towards Afon Wen, I could either retrace my steps or traverse round towards Foel Grach and then climb out there. This seemed like a good plan at the time, but gravity had other ideas and my traverse became a gradual descent ending with me somewhere around 700 metres in a gulley down the western slopes of Foel Grach. I started climbing out hoping to emerge on the col between the summit of that peak and Carnedd Llewelyn. This was a very steep energy sapping climb and once more I neglected to keep an eye on my bearing, as a result when I topped out I realised I had wandered too far NE and ended up right on the summit of Foel Goch (I was NOT happy).

I gathered myself and set out for Llewelyn, where I arrived to see Graham and Aled just leaving. This was an added blow as they had both stated before the race that they were aiming for an 8 hour completion (whereas I had hoped to finish in under 6). At this point I was all for giving up on the idea of pushing myself and just joining the two of them for a more leisurely day. However, two things made me change my mind, firstly the thought that I may still be able to contribute to the team score if I pressed on, and secondly Graham's inability to control his mirth at my misfortune. So I picked up the pace a little and set off for Dafydd, after leaving the summit I was caught by the front runners from the A section (Colin Donnelly and Dylan Jones) and I was able to forget about navigating for the descent as I knew they would know the way and so I ran after them, losing ground all the time of course but keeping them in sight until I was back below the mist. At the reservoir at Ffynnon Llugwy I met up with Liam and ran in to the Ogwen checkpoint with him.

By now the ascent up Nant yr Ogof was swarming with competitors from all the different classes. At least now the visibility was better and I had people who I could chase down and forget about feeling sorry for myself over my 'excursion' on the Beras. The descent to Pen Y Pass was straightforward, aside from finding a particularly deep bit of swamp and I arrived in relatively good spirits.

As a result I headed off up the Pyg track at a good rate of knots, steadily overtaking people as far as the junction with the path up to Crib Goch. In retrospect this was probably not a good idea as the effort now caught up with me. The water bottle that had been filled up at Pen y Pass was now empty, my legs felt like somebody else's (and not someone who enjoyed going uphill) and when I eventually caught sight of the zig-zags I felt as though there must have been some engineering work carried out since I was last there that had raised the incline to a crazy angle. I wondered how my slobbering, gasping and staggering appearance must have looked to those day trippers, descending in their flip flops eating ice-creams and drinking cold drinks purchased at the café. In my mind I begged each of them to offer me some fluid, but all they seem to do was pull their children to one side as if some lunatic were approaching. Also how annoying is it to be told by countless tourists 'Not far to go now'- to my tortured mind it sounded condescending, as if they thought I had got into this state just climbing up from Pen y Pass, I wanted to scream out 'DO YOU REALISE HOW FAR I HAVE JUST COME', but that would have taken energy that I just didn't have.

At the top of the zig zags I saw Bob and Neil looking relaxed and as though they had finished the event some time ago (indeed by this time they had probably been finished for about 40 minutes). They gave me some words of encouragement, that they were relying on my time to complete the team score, which coupled with the knowledge of how close I was to the finish gave me an extra spur. I pounded up to Crib y Ddysgyl and then ran back to the finger post and up towards the finish, passing a heavy gent sat at the side of the track drinking a can of 'Stella'! The finish brought relief, a time of 6 hrs 54, and a well earned cup of coffee at the summit café.

Walking back down to Llanberis and descending through the mist I was able to reflect on the enjoyable moments of the race....., well there was that cup of coffee at the end. As I still felt somewhat deflated after my detour that had lost me so much time and effort I just wanted to get home and moan about this to my wife (I find she is a very good listener to my excuses for sub standard performances in races- especially if there is something good on the television at the time!). I was therefore later pleasantly surprised to find that I actually finished 5<sup>th</sup> in the B section and was part of the winning team for North Wales Police.

I fully intend to run the event again next year, and hopefully do so without getting lost. Overall though I did enjoy the experience, the event was well organised and my thanks are extended to all those who played a part in this. I got a great sense of achievement and felt no guilt whatsoever at eating fish and chips that evening once I got home.

**Dave Owens**