John Parsons puts his best foot forward.

The story so far:- JP has been sitting around for over 30 years then on one January 1st he was moved. Ideas came thick and fast but in the end he settled for trying to run and here is the second part of the story so far .....

Location; Otley. Setting off from Bramhope, I ran over the Chevin, bivvying on a gorgeous night (right in the flight path for Leeds/Bradford), then running back the next day. A bit of a novelty weekend. Next in line was the 'Rydal Round' (9 miles/3000m) This is basically the Fairfield Horseshoe ran as part of Ambleside Sports. A red hot day in the show-field, but as the Wrestlers were grappling & the sheepdog were leaping six foot walls in the sunshine, we were shivering our way up Fairfield in the mist. The descent from Low crag is legendary (It is the route of the Professional Guides race on the same day), chest-high bracken hiding boulders, 'go for it & hope for the best' tactics!

A week later I was just up the road at Grasmere, the idea was to do a long run with an overnight camp, followed by another long run, testing out some bits of kit for the KIMM. I took a route from Dunmail Raise, up Steel Fell, over Langdale to Angle Tarn, Esk Hause- Scafell Pike, Brackenclose, Yewbarrow then camp. It was all going swimmingly (literally in this weather, horizontal rain, mist & howling wind while the rest of the country stayed indoors, shading from the blazing sun) until coming down Lingmell, I put my big toe through the front of my Walshes. I put up my tiny race tent (875 grams) in a downpour & settled down for the night. I awoke to the sound of boulders being swept along the riverbed, after a quick breakfast, I struck camp & was off. Over Kirk fell & Gable, then a reverse of Saturday is route. The clag was down so far I almost missed Angle tarn, then I was onto the dreary wasteland of Stake Pass. As I had never been up Helm Crag, so a bit of a detour & I was off (the summit was a bit hairy in wet Walsh's). By now the cloud had cleared & it wasn't a bad day, just the long haul up to Dunmail Raise & I was back at the motor & homeward bound.

I had a bit of a holiday in Ireland, but after running out of cash & flying back to a fuel crisis, the only glimmer of hope was the Dale Head race at Borrowdale show. This little beauty is only 4 miles with 2250m of ascent, another Championship race. I had never raced over such a short distance since I was a lad, I knew the pace would be fierce. A typical day of Lakes weather greeted the crowds who had come to watch all sorts of action. At 2pm we were off, a stream of bobbing heads led into the distance snaking up into the mist & through the quarries, the route wasn't marked & at the top of the quarries the field split into two. You know you must be getting somewhere near the top when someone hurls themselves down the fell at a rate of knots. The cairn was reached but no hanging about today for views, back down & hopefully going a bit quicker than on the ascent!

I have never seen so many falls on a descent, it was absolute a bit like roller skating down a very steep hill. There were 2 routes of equal peril: One through the quarry; wet greasy slate, the other down the grass; equally as slippy, but not as painful to fall on. The last 1/2 mile was on the flat along a rocky bridleway & through a bog, the finish was a pleasing sight. I spent the rest of the day watching wrestling, shin kicking & various other (unique to this neck-of-the-woods) sporting events, a good day out was had by all.

Next on the horizon was the 'Open Country Mountain Marathon', a five hour score event run in teams of two, held this year in the Howgills. It is best to decide on a route early, otherwise (as we found out to our cost) you end up a long way from home, having grafted for some highly pointed checkpoints, only to lose these points for going over the 5 hour limit. We ran over by 18 minutes, but this meant we lost 36 points (the hardest checkpoints are only worth 40 points.) It is a highly specialised game, but there were people worse off than we were. I spoke to one pair who had lost more points than they had gained by coming in over an hour late. The winners on the other hand, sprinted round the whole course, clicking every single checkpoint; impressive stuff.

This led to the main event, the KIMM. After 6 weeks of 50-60 miles per week, I felt ready. The forecast for the weekend was diabolical, but as we lounged about on the (somewhat boggy) playing field at Millom School, in the sunshine we felt optimistic. The Registration centre was buzzing with people & the trade stands were doing a roaring trade (all night & next morning), punters were snapping up new tents, waterproofs, stoves, shoes, etc. (In fact everything that I personally would have thoroughly tested & hammered prior to the event, to see that it was up to the task.) I was doing the KIMM with a mate from work: Les, who is also my training partner. Well fed & watered, I slept like a baby, feeling relatively optimistic. This feeling was shattered at about 5.45am next morning, when I saw the weather. Black Combe was nowhere to be seen & it was considerably colder. With only one toilet, I thought it would be best to pay a call early on, I guessed I would be one of the first at such an unearthly time. Wrong! The queue was at least 30 people long & not moving at all. After waiting 20 minutes, I gave up & legged it back to the kettle I had put on to boil as I left the tent earlier. A rushed bowl of Ready Brek & several pints of tea, then we followed the convoy to the start. It's funny that no matter how long you allow yourself, you always end up rushing. Our allocated start time was 09:48, we got to the start 2 minutes before this time, just as the clouds burst. The map provided at the start made me wish I had done a serious recce of the area, pretty featureless (especially when a lot of the map detail has been removed) with several long legs early on. We agreed that in the conditions it would be best to climb Black Combe first & taking a bearing from the summit. Then we were off.

Continued

The route headed North over the pathless & most boggy hills towards Devoke Water. I had (unbeknown to me) made a major weight-saving sacrifice whilst packing on Friday night. The icy rain was being blown sideways on the haul up Black Combe, it really was a case of follow-the-leader until we reached the summit. I had made a last minute decision over waterproofs the night before: A proper Cag (bombproof Patagonia mountain jacket) or a lightweight effort (lightweight being the only benefit). I had opted for the proper cag. Imagine my shock & surprise, when on top of Black Combe, in one of the worst storms in living memory, I reached into my sack & pulled out my lightweight leggings & (wait for it) my Gore-Tex salopettes (packed in the stuffsac where my jacket resides). I was dumbstruck, the only thing to do was improvise with a bin liner. The Gore-Tex pair was minus braces & a tad too large, so I did a nice impression of MC. Hammer, with the crotch around my knees, until I stashed them back in the bag.

Progress in the conditions was very slow; I had never been in such a boggy, swampy mess for some time. Some Army lads at checkpoint 2 told us that there was a cut-off of 16:00 at checkpoint 4. With this we legged it, the clouds cleared & it even stopped raining for 10 minutes. We arrived at checkpoint 4 at 15:30, safe we thought "Wrong again; the cut off was at checkpoint 5. It was a long haul & we despite our best efforts, we arrived about 1/2 an hour too late for the cut-off. That was it, the KIMM was over for us. We later discovered that roughly a third of our class had retired on day 1 & that there had been a huge percentage of dropouts in most classes. We trudged through the calf deep mud down to the swollen River Duddon at the foot of Harter Fell. The stepping stones were nowhere to be seen in the raging torrent, a compulsory detour upstream to the bridge & down the other side, by now it was getting dark, the rain had stopped but the wind was gusting stronger & stronger. The hills were littered with the dots of headlamps, there were luckless punters still out there trying to find checkpoints in the dark. The campsite was in a big field just next to the Seathwaite Climbing hut. (Having stayed there last year, I knew how luxurious it was.) We found a flattish spot & attempted to put up our home for the night:

'The Sup-Air tent is possibly the lightest tent in the world, it is purely a race tent & needs certain skills to use it in rain or wind' so the catalogue said, the ability to shrink & also laminate myself sprung to mind. We struggled a bit in the swirling, gusty winds, but finally got it up & I paddled off to the stream to get some water. I came back to the sound of Les cursing the tent, which was blowing flat (it was a bit better with 2 people in), then we settled down for the night. We began the long procession of brewing up & making a luxurious meal (Chilli Beanfeast). The tent was surprisingly long but amazingly low, with no porch there was no option but to cook inside. Les got laid out in his sleeping bag, while I pulled my bivvy bag over my shoulders, I was still in my wet kit but I knew I would be going back out into the stormy

night, so I didn't want to risk getting my spare clothes wet just yet. Noodles followed by a monster chilli (I had just piled the Beanfeast mix in a poly bag with as many dried fiery things as possible) & gallons of tea.

I braved the weather & the slurry-like field for one more time to fill up the water container (foil innards of a wine-box, super light!) from the distant stream. It was a grim night, somehow my sleeping bag which had managed to stay dry all day, had got wet ! not good. My dry socks & long johns were soon wet; I laid for a while then got inside my bivvy bag as well. I was wet already so a bit of condensation (even though I wasn't really producing enough heat for condensation) wasn't going to make much difference. The tent fabric was constantly blowing across my face. Bubble wrap is great for weight saving but not nearly as comfy as a karrimat. I tossed & turned & shivered until about 4am (I thought Les had slipped into a coma).

At some point in the wee hours, I woke feeling very cold indeed. Unable to get back to sleep, I undid my hood to discover I was outside the tent! The door had somehow blown open & I had slipped out into the stormy night exposed from the shoulders upwards. An account from one of the Elite competitors summed it up nicely: 'There is no comparison to an overnight camp on a mountain marathon. Wet Walshes, mud everywhere, a Karrimat the size of a pocket handkerchief, blisters which are bigger, the prospect of a night when you may not sleep because you are so cold and through it all the certainty that this is the cosy lap of luxury compared to the day before and the one to follow.'

I was relieved to hear the neighbours bashing their pots & pans at about 6am. I was feeling smug about the fact that I had got some water the night before, then I discovered an empty container. Everybody looked incredibly rough, our neighbours were dashing about a bit quicker than necessary after asking me the time as I had forgot to adjust my watch to account for the extra hour, dropping their tents & shovelling down luke-warm porridge.

We had a leisurely breakfast, not rushing at all, knowing their race was over & after a long night with no sleep, it was going to be a bit of a haul back to the start. We walked right past the front door of one of my favourite pubs, 'The Newfields', but with not a bean between us we hurried on down the road to Ulpha. The surrounding ridges were chocker with runners, we decided to cut across land back to Black Combe & we were with the masses for a while then we parted and made our way along a quickest route/straight line with 2 lads from Eyri Harriers. It was a cold & blustery day but with visibility 1000 times better than the previous day. Everything was going swimmingly until just before the umpteenth river crossing, disaster happened:

Whilst I was scaling a tall barbed wire fence supported by a loose dry stone wall, the wall collapsed & I plummeted 8 foot down a vertical bank, cracking my knee on a boulder whilst the wall collapsed on top of me. An overpowering nauseous feeling came over me, I thought at first that I had broken my leg. Whilst out-of-bounds, wearing a bin liner (I had upgraded to a harder wearing 2 layer model) & demolishing a dry stone wall. It didn't look good, but I hobbled onwards & upwards.

The paths around the area are amazingly faint for the Lakes, some are almost non-existent. At one point the path led across a river & through a garden. Then we were back on the road to base. Black Combe was

littered with runners & after a couple of hairy road miles; we were back at the start. It seemed that we had been away for a lot longer than just over 32 hours, there were a lot

of tired looking punters about, but after a cup of multi-flavoured soup, a tasty buttie & a mug of magic tea, the tales & epics began to flow. The elite class had finished in a dead heat. Winners of the B-class were subsequently disqualified & placed last, when it was discovered that they worked for the company who produced the map & there had been a very high number of retirements on both days.

There was only the obstacle of the car park which by now was 6' deep in liquid ooze, to contend with, then we were homeward bound, dry clothes, fish & chips twice, 2 gallons of tea & a red hot bath!

As one competitor said of the KIMM ' It reminds you that you're alive!'

John Parsons

E-mail comments on the recent problems
you have to laugh....

after years of abuse and disregard amongst much of the climbing fraternity (me included at times) Baildon Bank has finally become a highly popular spot. The excellent weather last Sunday brought crowds from Cumbria to sample the botanical delights of Yorkshire's finest vertical sandpit.

By late morning you had to queue for a place on the classics - Epitaph, Hades, Joanna etc. Most popular question of the day was, " Excuse me mate - do you know how to get down from here?"

At this rate even the box quarry might get cleaned by the end of summer... (No - I'm just getting silly now) This does still look a truly awful prospect. Take a ground fall in there and you'll probably be gone forever.

If the weather isn't up to much I can recommend Rock City in Hull as an alternative to Leeds Wall. It doesn't seem to get too busy and there are some excellent routes. It has more of a natural rock feel to it than many of the Leeds routes, although there didn't seem to be so much leading potential. It also has an extensive, but generally very hard, tendon busting, bouldering cave.

Hope everyone manages to find something to do over Easter. all the best Pete
****
Oh well, time to dust off the Yorks Grit guide and go to Baildon. What about Scatological Glen, just around the corner? Is that open? There are a couple of recently-opened minor quarries over in my neck of the woods for the true connoisseur of green gritstone. Those (fool)hardy climbers who are brave enough can contact me at the usual address. Those who want to avoid me at all costs can look it up in the Kinder, Chew Valley and Lancs guidebooks and go on their own.
Steve.
****
TO ALL FELLRUNNERS It has become increasingly apparent that the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease is not going to end in the near future and that its effects on fell-running are going to be severe and long-lasting.

Up to now the FRA has been contacting organisers and races have been cancelled on a three-week-in-advance rolling programme and the updated information has been placed on the FRA Website but, as the number of races per week increases, this is proving to be inadequate.

The FRA appreciates that the situation is in many respects a confused one but, as the body representing a sport carried out wholly in rural, and hence largely agricultural, areas we would not wish to be seen in any way to increase the risk of the spread of the disease, either through races themselves or by encouraging large numbers of runners to travel from and/or through affected areas in order to get to a race elsewhere.

Therefore the FRA has cancelled all FRA registered races until further notice.