

## **A MOOR, A RACE, A SONG** **from Graham Breeze**

### **The Ilkley Moor Fell Race 1990-2004**

If you run very quickly, or just sing slowly, the interminable dirge of the nine verses of *On Ilkla' Moor Baht 'At* can last even longer than the fell race: or perhaps it just feels like it.

#### **The Heritage**

Ilkley Moor is the part of the extensive Rombalds Moor (high point 1320 feet) which lies near to the old spa town of Ilkley and connects with Hawksworth Moor, Bingley Moor, Burley Moor, etc. The moor has been generously served by fell races which have come and gone over the years. Races have been named after the Cow and Calf rocks for clambering over, Dick Hudson's pub for celebrating in and the spa waters of White Wells with their restorative and recuperative qualities for when the clambering and celebrating have gone too far. Relays include the Badger Stone and Bradford Millennium Way, there are the Jack Bloor races, the Rombalds Stride, etc.

In 1987, before most of the races referred to above existed, Skyrac AC promoted a "half-marathon" which took 300 runners from the Skyrac base in Guiseley out to Ilkley Moor and back. The inclusion of long sections of both moor and road left most finishers in a state of shock. The half-marathon turned out to be around 16 miles, the mud mystified the roadrunners and the tarmac traumatised the fellrunners. The race was not repeated; which was a pity because the organisers have since claimed that they had inadvertently discovered trail racing.

Even before 1987 Ilkley had been the base for a "professional" race over the moor but this event stopped after 1985 which, coincidentally, was the year Ilkley Harriers was formed.

#### **The Race**

However of all these events the pure fell race that draws the biggest field is the Short A race designed by Peter McWilliam and inaugurated by Ilkley Harriers in 1990 which is known simply as the **Ilkley Moor Fell Race**.

The first event saw 194 turn up and the fifteenth, last February, had 281 finishers.

Races come and go, entries wax and wane but the combination of a challenging route, the proximity of dozens of local fellrunning clubs, the delightful venue of Ilkley and the excellent organisation of Ilkley Harriers have combined to produce fellrunning heaven.

#### **From The Tourist Office**

Ilkley Moor is not just any old moor. Ilkley is one of Yorkshire's expensively delightful towns through which flows the serene Wharfe and its heather upland is richly populated with grouse, people trying to shoot the same and walkers. The town includes Roman remains and the gritstone moor is equally famous for its evidence of early man, being liberally dotted with Bronze age relics including the Twelve Apostles stone circle (presumably known by another name in the Bronze age), the carved Swastika Stone, evocative of carvings found in Scandinavia, and many cup and ring marked stones.

History, the opportunity to take the waters, a first class fell race; no wonder the fellrunning world beats a path to Ilkley every February.

#### **The Route**

Although the course is demanding, taking in rough terrain and steep climbs, it starts on a good track adjacent to residential property (Wells Road) rising steadily to pass The Tarn. The path then narrows to cross Backstone Beck prior to climbing up to Ilkley's famous rock landmark; the Cow and Calf. A wide level path leads to a steep climb up to the Pancake Stone followed by a level stretch back to Backstone Beck so runners can lose all the height they gained whilst plunging down a rough narrow path to a small footbridge.

A sharp left turn then allows runners the pleasure of hauling themselves all the way back up the hill but on the other side of the beck prior to swooping down the Rocky Valley on a stony path.

Then follows another stiff climb up the side of the Valley to a large cairn followed by a long stretch along the skyline above Ilkley on rough terrain. After Barmishaw Hole there is a steady haul south, often against the wind, up to the Badger Stone and then east across rough terrain and small paths to cross the Keighley Gate road plunging down Weary Hill and after briefly rejoining the road, runners then cross Spicey Gill. An easy climb on a path through bracken is followed by a fast traverse before a final giddy plunge down to the finish.

Wonderful!

And all this joy is not confined to adults because there is also a junior race.

**Four Miles ? Six Miles ? Call Yourself A Fellrunner ?**

Every fellrunner knows that whether a race is categorised as Long/Medium/ Short or A/B/C has more to do with the vanity of the race organiser and an inability to do sums than with an accurate examination of topography and terrain. For years the Ilkley Moor race was categorised as 4.5 miles feet (AS) although to excuse their slow times many runners claimed that it was really a Long A. Indeed in 1991 Dave Woodhead's *Up and Down* magazine suggested that "*the route is nearer to 6 miles than the advertised 4.5*", an opinion readily endorsed by all who wondered why they ran out of puff after digging in for the final sprint and found themselves to be a few breaths short of the finish.

Yorkshire folk do not rush to judgement and after 12 years of reflection the race organisers advertised the 2003 race as 5.5 miles to keep the carpers quiet. Finally in 2004 after definitive measurement the race length was declared to be 5 miles with 1260 feet of climb; so no more cheap jokes.

### Hats Off To Gary

Of course up at the front the odd mile or ten makes little difference and over the years the roll call of winners includes many, but interestingly not all, of the greats of Yorkshire fellrunning. First winner was Gary Devine in all of his 1990 British Champion pomp with Pudsey & Bramley taking the first four places and a 21-year-old Simon Booth (Keswick) taking fifth place, although Simon might now be better known in Yorkshire for his consecutive Three Peaks Race victories in 2000 and 2002.

Gary won again in 1991, prompting the Dave Woodhead headline above (for our younger readers this is a pun on a song "Hats Off to Larry" written and recorded in 1961 by Del Shannon), and for a third time in 1995; a feat later bettered by P&B club mate Rob Hope with three consecutive wins 2000-2002 to follow his first win in 1996. Gary still turns up to race; in 2002 he was 3<sup>rd</sup> and in 2003 he came 2<sup>nd</sup> !

Rob's wins included the Foot & Mouth year of 2001 when the race was the first event in the FRA Calendar to be cancelled and one of the first to be rescheduled to November to maintain a 15-year continuous run.

If Pudsey & Bramley have dominated the Men's race, possibly because the men of Bingley Harriers never turn out in strength, at least Bingley Ladies in recent years have demonstrated their prowess and, after all, Ilkley Moor is only over the hill from Bingley.

### For The Record

1990 Gary Devine	P&B	39.57	Emma Thackray	Fellandale	52.12
1991 Gary Devine	P&B	39.00	Anne Buckley	Leeds City	47.38
1992 James Parker	Ilkley	37.29	Carol Greenwood	Calder Valley	45.12
1993 Neil Wilkinson	U/A.	36.55	Lucy Wright	Leeds Univ.	45.57
1994 Martin Corbett	Rossendale	40.18	Carol Greenwood	Bingley	46.42
1995 Gary Devine	P&B	36.46	Emma Hodgson	Fellandale	46.52
1996 Rob Hope	Horwich	37.29	Lucy Wright	Leeds City	43.48R
1997 Steve Oldfield	Brad Aire	38.02	Sarah Brown	Bowland	47.38
1998 Greg Hull	Leeds City	36.22	Jo Prowse	K. & Craven	47.20
1999 Rob Jebb	Bingley	38.19	Emma Barclay	Ilkley	51.21
2000 Rob Hope	P&B	38.31	Lucy Whittaker	Saddleworth	48.23
2001 Rob Hope	P&B	38.23	Mary Wilkinson	Skipton	46.01
2002 Rob Hope	P&B	37.39	Pauline Munro	Bingley	50.04
2003 George Ehrhardt	Todmorden	38.12	Helen Johnson	Bingley	47.57
2004 Simon Bailey	Staffs Moor	35.31R	Helen Johnson	Bingley	46.43

### English Championship ?

Traditionally the Ilkley Moor Fell Race has been the opening event in the Skyrac Fell Championship, illustrating that it is equally worthy to be an English Championship counter. However the narrowness of part of the route near the race start and the proximity of the start to where the good burghers of Ilkley burnish their Bentleys mean that FRA blessing has never been sought. Anyway Yorkshire folk like to keep the best things for themselves.

So, instead of seeking Championship glory, Ilkley Harriers have enhanced their race by staging junior races. The 2003 race attracted 57 children and the number grew to 69 in 2004. Ilkley Harriers is enthusiastically developing fellrunning for its junior section and is optimistic that the Junior Ilkley Moor Fell Race will grow in popularity; as you will see if you turn up in February 2005.

### Thank You

To Ilkley Harriers for allowing me to write about their race and in particular to Paul Wood who maintains the excellent Ilkley Harriers website which was a source for material.

### Finally - The Song

**1** Wheer wor'ta bahn w'en Ah saw thee,  
On Ilkla' Moor baht 'at ?  
Wheer wor'ta bahn w'en Ah saw thee ?  
Wheer wor'ta bahn w'en Ah saw thee ?

(Chorus) On Ilkla' Moor baht 'at,  
On Ilkla' Moor baht 'at, On Ilkla' Moor baht 'at, On Ilkla' Moor baht 'at.

**2** Tha's bin a-courtin' Mary Jane, On Ilkla' Moor baht 'at  
Tha's bin (twice)

(Chorus)

**3** Tha's bahn to get thi deeath o'cowd  
(as before)

**4** Then we shall ha' to bury thee

**5** Then t'wurms 'll come an' ate thee up

**6** Then t'ducks 'll come an' ate up t'wurms

**7** Then we shall go an' ate up t'ducks

**8** Then we shall all 'ave etten thee

**9** That's wheer we get us oahn back.