

The Day We Plodded up a Hill but Ran Down a Mountain.....

Many futile attempts over the summer months to organise a trip to an AL or AM fell race led us up the A1 to Cleveland today. The 3 Tops was our target, a shortish race with the required AM categorisation, and therefore a 3 Peaks qualifier (I was told). As happens in times of desperation, someone suggests something and we all reply baaing happily without looking fully into the implications.....

A quick peek on Google Maps last week showed why firstly it had gained its name and secondly why it was an AM. There were indeed 3Tops (each with a viewing point which roughly translates as stupidly high above sea-level), and shortish turned into 8.7miles. When one of the runners informed me that Roseberry Topping was known locally as the Cleveland Matterhorn I had that 'what have I done ' feeling once again.

Still, plans had been made, babysitters organised and after all it was only 8 miles!

The trip to Cleveland was pleasant enough, the sun was shining, the mood was light. Then, in the distance it appeared, the Matterhorn, beautifully set against a back-drop of clear blue sky, ridiculously standing proud above anything else on the horizon. That was supposedly peak2, what were the others going to be like? A deathly hush befell the car.

We held it together by pretending to like the town of Guisborough, ignoring the fact that when we stopped at a local cash point the wind-chill factor revealed that an outside temperature of 5C was drastically reduced to at most -15, and we all hastily donned another layer (well I did).

Registering was a simple process, but the fear factor was cranked up yet another notch by the fact that everyone else looked to be a serious runner, we were indeed the comedy act, and when a mandatory kit check of full body cover and whistles was threatened, well it was only the fact that we were munching merrily on bacon sanis that prevented us from turning tail and heading for that really nice pub we'd passed on the way.....

For me, mild hysteria set in, I don't know how many times I uttered my infamous mantra of 'we are running together', but by the time we set off the tough Clevelanders were almost unable to run for laughing at the sight of us soft southerners (well me anyway) wearing everything I possessed whilst they had obviously decided to run the risk of the kit check and sped off wearing just shorts and a vest!

An uphill start, always my favourite (!) was halted mercifully by a gate, where we re-grouped. From there on it was remarkably painless, running on wide paths through woods, reminiscent of the start to Round Hill or to running on the Chevin and I felt quite at home (if rather too hot). Even peak 1 was ok, more of a peaklet. We were treated to a view of the sea, friendly marshalls and the chance to run through mud that was at a pleasant depth.

A good descent, and then the Matterhorn. I've often wondered whether being at the back of the pack, and seeing, laid out in front of you, a little snake of runners going up, up and up again is more or less soul-destroying than being at the front of the pack, busting a gut and trying truly hard. I

doubt I will ever know, but even though I hate up, the snakely sight was really quite inspiring. I had carried my camera with me for this moment, but I suspected that had I stopped to capture the sight I would actually be last, so you will just have to imagine!

Roseberry Top was upon us, a proper hands-on-thighs grind, and a force gazillion gale at the top that threatened to blow us all into the abyss below. A hilarious descent, involving full-speed head-on collisions with brambles and aqua-planing made this one of the funnest races I've done in ages. I got a bit giddy thinking it was all over, but then realised that Top 3 was still to come. More descent and Top 3 arrived – Bonus!

We'd agreed to split once the route returned to the marked paths of the Cleveland Way, and it was with heavy heart that I saw Nige, Andrew and Keith disappear into the distance, whilst Ian and I plodded through what was now knee-deep mud. It was every man for himself, and home was calling so all thoughts of camaraderie were dispelled and the push to the end ensued. A minor navigational error in the woods was followed by the sight of the third lamppost on the left that had in this instance replaced the finish funnel!

On Doctors orders we retired to the bar, the boys having had the joy of changing rooms, whilst I struggled to disentangle myself from my kit in a toilet cubicle, and we partook of the local brew whilst sitting open-mouthed as the winning times were revealed. Needless to say we didn't win any prizes, but left with two bleeding knees, two falls, and a near submission.

I'm a total wimp as far as fell races are concerned, but this was awesome, totally runnable and I will be back next year.

Someone lithe, fit and young won it in 66mins, we managed:

Andy Wilson	86 th	102:58
Nigel Tapper	89 th	103:42
Keith Wood	91 st	104:30
Sue Bickerdike	96 th	107:05
Ian Hunter	99 th	113:26 (in only his 2 nd ever fell race)

As I said, we plodded up to the summit of Roseberry Top, a mere hill, but by climbing to the top of the trig point we added the obligatory 2ft, and descended a mountain.