

THE RINGS OF FIRE 1992 REPORT AND RESULTS

"Too tough". That was the consensus of opinion regarding the Rings courses. I make no apology for the toughness, since I feel that courses should reflect the character of the terrain they are set in. They were supposed to be stiff tests & advertised as such - probably the toughest many of you had ever experienced - but what achievement is there in doing something too easy? We reckon that if you can do Bruce's Crown inside 18½ hrs. then a Bob Graham Round is within reach; under 16 hrs. & a 22½ hr. Bob Graham Round is a possibility (but you will probably have done a BGR already). Since there are plenty of mild events there is a need for tough ones, but the interest in long distance hill challenges is limited to a small number of walkers & runners. Fewer still are those who can successfully complete the courses: 9 last year on the 50 miler, & 6 this (by coincidence 21 entered & 15 started on both years!).

Being a branch of the Long Distance Walkers Association we hoped to make the challenge accessible to as wide a range of ability as possible, & I was glad to see a good mix of walkers & hill runners. On Bruce's Crown they ranged from speed merchant David Atiyah with his whishies, day sack, & brilliant time, to Harold Helton & Lawrence Hainey with boots, heavy packs, & blisters, who are an example on perseverance to us all. However, this range of ability over such a vast area means a lot of marshal time, & I am very lucky to have a great team of reliable helpers, most of whom are hill walkers (so knew what you were suffering!), & who got on with their tasks with great common sense, more often than not in some midge-infested spot. My sincere thanks go out to so many kind people who have helped: Dennis & Mary Hurst who, as last year, were very supportive; they coordinated the East side, helped put out & collect controls, made cakes, marshalled, & "swept" the Rhinns of Kells. Bob Peace came back for a second year, bringing his children Sarah & Andrew with him, instead of Kath this time. Between them they looked after both Dee Brig & Millfire CIP's. Another stalwart from last year was David Martin, who drove the support vehicle, & spent a very long time marshalling at Gala Lane. He also persuaded his friends Mackay Smith & Fraser Ball that they should do more hill-walking: they certainly got more than a taste of bad weather as their reward for being marshals at Targessock on Sunday morning! Geoff Smith competed last year & returned this year with friend Charlie McEwan to man Targessock all day Saturday, collected controls, & donated his expenses to event funds. Last year's winner Ronald Turnbull also returned this year to help by placing controls, manning the Loch Enoch CIP, & donating expenses. Colin Butler averted a panic situation by the loan of orienteering punches, & helped after the event day by collecting up controls. And of course Grace, who distributed food & drink on Saturday evening (after her marshalling stint at the bield by Loch Dee), & then all day Sunday (not only to Rings finishers, but also to the Forestry Commission's hill race),

with such cheerfulness & unflustered efficiency that not a single midge dared to land in the custard this year! One lady not present to receive compliments personally was Peggy Irvine, who spent a day baking for us: it was applauded by all for its high quality.

On the official side (although I have ceased to think of them in that light) are three people in the Forestry Commission office at Creebridge, Newton Stewart, who I have pestered for a lot of help since February: manager Jim Hamilton, Jock Livingstone, & Margaret Murdoch. The F.C. gave their blessing on access for anybody mad enough to travel such distances on foot, sponsored the event by way of photocopying & giving facilities at Caldons campsite, loaned punches & keys, & gave professional advice. Mr. & Mrs. Askew, the campsite wardens, welcomed us to an already busy site & enhanced life greatly by kindly letting us use the cabin as an event centre. Their support on Sunday evening, as I became increasingly worried, was also much appreciated. The other two forest districts of Castle Douglas, & Ayrshire, also viewed the event kindly & lent us keys.

As last year the event was high on enthusiasm but too low on income, & I wonder if I'm too biased towards long distance hill routes to be subjective. Since we only got the same number of entries this year despite the event being more widely advertised, it does beg the question: are there enough people of the right calibre who can be brought together on the same date to make an event viable? Is it perhaps the wrong time of the year, or the remoteness of this corner of the country? In short: is it worth all the time given by so many willing helpers when so few people take up the challenge? If it is the severity that causes small numbers then I have two options: compromise on the challenge or give up. Would it make any difference if the courses were less strenuous, or indeed should they be publicised as super-severe (as Ronald Turnbull suggests in his piece) to attract more customers? Feedback would be welcomed.

HEART OF GRANITE TIMESHEET (Elapsed time in brackets)

	Club	Loch Dee	Loch Enoch N.E.	Loch Enoch S.W.	Finish	Time
Peter Cairns	ECKO	10-30 (1h 30m)	12-40 (3h 40m)	4-24 (7h 24m)	6-06	9h. 06m.
Kate Foster	IND.	11-18 (2h 18m)	1-37 (4h 37m)	6-00 (9hrs)	7-59	10h. 59m.
Mike Van Beinum	IND.				7-59	10h. 59m.
June Howard	AIRE C.P.	11-15 (2h. 15m)	2-05 (5h. 05m)	6-52 (9h. 52m)	9-27	12h. 27m.
Virginia Young	AIRE C.P.				9-27	12h. 27m.
Jean Cairns	ECKO				9-27	12h. 27m.
Patti Lean	IND.	11-28 (2h 28m)	2-35 (5h 35m)	5-45 (8h. 45m)	Missed Targessock	
Jim Richmond	IND.					

Ronald Turnbull has sent me his view of the course from his station

at Loch Enoch S.W., & I quote part of his letter: "The general opinion was of a splendid route, tough but fun, although CIP's was perhaps an unnecessary cruelty. I was asked if this reflected my sense of humour: no, this was Elyn's sense of humour. Mine appeared at unlucky 13, & I hope you didn't mind too much finding the control in the middle of the burn. I was sure all your feet would be quite wet by then anyway."

"Apologies to Peter Cairns: he came through so fast that I had no time to calculate that he had an outside chance for the course record (8 hrs. 48 m). That record was set by a runner who knows these hills intimately, & Peter's time is splendid given the very tough ground which can reduce the fastest to a pathetic 2 m.p.h. Condolences to Patti Lean & Jim Richmond: from their strength & good spirits as they returned from the Tursheen tussocks I am satisfied that they could have completed the entire course in 13 hrs. or so. Congratulations to all who faced up to a course that must have surprised them with its toughness. (C.f. Bruce's Crown which is twice the distance but takes only 1.7 times as long).
"The event, although run with extreme stinginess (did you identify CIP's 7 & 13 as recycled floor mops?), won't really work without more people. So please tell everyone how nasty it is, & maybe they'll want to come next time". (!)

I did agonise about that everlasting leg from Loch Enoch to Tursheen Lane but wanted you to savour that superb ridge from Targessock to Merrick. At least it let you experience all the variety of terrain that the Galloway Hills have to offer, & you need the contrast to really appreciate the fast progress on those super ribs of granite. The paths in August are better defined than earlier in the year but you had to be lucky to find them on this course. The trig point on Craiglee's granite tor must be the most photogenic in the area, & although you had no distant views there were compensations: rock outcrops etched with heather, patterns of bright lichen on glacial erratics, goats posing on rock ledges, wild flowers, the weird Deil's Bowling Green, Loch Enoch girt with silver sands, & of course bilberries at their peak, especially on the struggle up Targessock.

BRUCE'S CROWN

I apologise for not getting to Loup of Laggan in time to see the first six through. This must have destroyed confidence in manned CIP's & some did not look as hard as they should have done for no. 12 on Millfire ridge. The damp & grey day steadily worsened until by 7 p.m. the rain had begun. (If it's any consolation that wet W/E: $\frac{1}{4}$ " rain, was one in a succession of many, making it the wettest August for a long long time). By the time 2 ranges had been traversed the field was much reduced in numbers & energy. Some who had been going strongly at first retired at Dee Brig, whilst Billy Hamilton, 4th fastest to Gata Lane, left his decision until there before opting out; only 4 made it to the comparatively ridge free overnight halt. That night we all got wet & cold & bitter, but some had a remarkably comfortable bivvy like Ray & Pat Bolton who overslept nearly 2000 ft. up on the side of Cairnsgaroch. Others crawled into dark recesses beneath conifers for a mattress of pine needles.

Sleeping fitfully with the rain pattering, more often outside the awning than under it, I woke often, thinking I heard sounds of approaching travellers. Finally came the alarm at 4.30 a.m. & the nightmare that I'd run the Boltons over. Later that Sunday morning, driving along a forest road laden with retirees & steamed windscreen, I nearly fulfilled that bit of déjà vu as they trudged wearily along in the rain. Somehow we packed 2 more into the old car (6 of us + packs + boxes of food!), &

so back to Caldons & the comfort of the campsite log cabin to await the brave few who continued for a second day.

BRUCE'S CROWN TIMESHEET (Elapsed time in brackets)

	LOOP LAGGAN	DEE BRIG	MILL- FIRE	GALA LANE	HALT IN	SITE OUT	"REST" TIME	TARFE- SSOCK	FINISH TIME	MISSED CIP'S	NET TIME
David Atiyah	11-10 (2h.10m)	12-35 (3h.35m)	—	5-40 (8h.40m)	7-16 (10h.16)	5-28	10h.12m	7-30 (2h.02)	10-58 (5h.30)	No.12 No.20	15h.46m.
Mark Kassyk	11-30 (2h.30)	1-08 (4h.08)	3-35 (6h.35)	6-30 (9h.30)	8-09 (11h.09)	7-31	11h.22m	9-55 (2h.24)	2-25 (6h.54)		18h.03m.
Nigel Rose	11-30 (2h.30)	12-58 (3h.58)	—	6-36 (9h.36)	8-12 (11h.12)	6-10	9h.58m.	8-45 (2h.35)	1-21 (7h.11)	No.12	18h.23m.
Chris Black	11-40 (2h.40)	1-34 (4h.34)	4-21 (7h.21)	8-03 (11h.03)	10-21 (13h.21)	6-10	7h.49m	9-25 (3h.15)	2-43 (8h.33)	No.20	21hr.54m.
Harold Helton	11-58 (2h.58)	2-20 (5h.20)	5-32 (8h.32)	10-02 (13h.02)	—	—	approx. 8hrs.	—	7-24		26hr.24m.
Lawrence Hainey	11-58 (2h.58)	2-20 (5h.20)	5-32 (8h.32)	10-02 (13h.02)	—	—	approx. 8hrs.	—	7-24		26hr.24m.
John Wrightson	11-45	1-34	4-21	8-03	Retired just before halt site approx 10pm @ 35mb.						
Pat Bolton	12-25	3-26	6-34	(closed)	} Retired between Lochs Doon & Riecaur @ 31 mls.						
Roy Bolton	12-25	3-26	6-34	(closed)							
Billy Hamilton	11-15	12-40	2-57	7-00	Retired at Gala Lane.						
David Brooks	12-55	3-45	7-29	6-30 (SON)	Retired at Gala Lane.						
Stuart Smith	11-15	1-03	Had to retire at Dee Brig following a fall on Cairnarroch.								
Ian Leighton	11-30	1-14	Retired at Dee Brig with old knee problem.								
Alan Whiteside	12-02	2-50	Retired at Dee Brig.								
Roy Topham	12-02	2-50	Retired at Dee Brig.								

On the Rings WIE the wigwam botly was burnt down by hooligans. At the same time they also smashed every window in marshal Geoff Smith's car, dented bodywork, & stole golf clubs & battery. What justice is that for a man who gave up the whole of Saturday to help with the event?

But I'm not going to end on a sour note. Having devised & completed both routes I am full of admiration for those who managed the full distances. To see Lawrence & Harold finally return to Caldons, after battling against the most atrocious conditions, was to see conquering heroes.

What a contrast between the mean minds of vandals who get their kicks out of destruction, & the noble spirits of you who got your enjoyment from overcoming the challenge of the hills. Thank you all for your support, & especially those who were kind enough to say they enjoyed it. I feel that the Rings (if it is to continue) should become a biennial event; but next year resilient Geoff Smith is planning a triathlon, so the area will not be devoid of home-grown mountain events.

If you relish long days in the hills, or epic endurance/challenge events, you may be interested in joining Galloway Striders (GALLOWAYS) which is the local group of the Long Distance Walkers Association. Cost is minimal, & we try to keep each other informed on interesting events, & attempts on long distance routes (not necessarily competitive). Please write to me at: The Bing, Kirkiner, Wigtownshire, DG8 9BZ. (Elyn Jones - sec. of GALLOWAYS).