



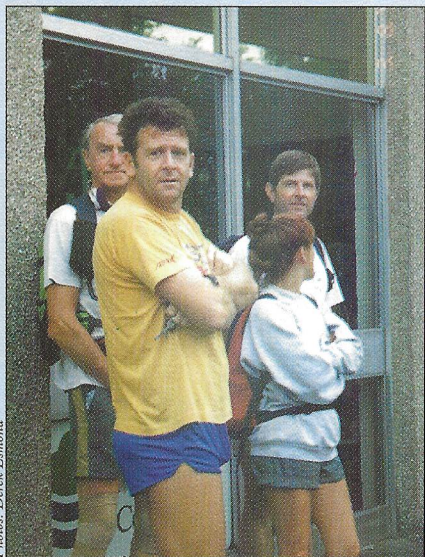
Photos: Ronald Turnbull

Bruce's Crown

Left: the Tarfessock bivvy.

Above: leaving Lamachan

Limestone Limp - August 3



Photos: Derek Esmond

Above: Derek Hartley, Nigel Stephenson, Mr & Mrs John Sparshatt at the start.

Below: Charlie Thompson & Glennys at CP4.



Above: The Bashforth horde (minus Keith) ready for the off.

Below: Joyce Walker, Lillian Millen & Mike Allen at Great Stones, checkpoint 3.



Bruce's Crown - August 31/September 1

1994

42 miles with 13,000 feet of ascent in 24 hours walking time in the Galloway Hills.

AFTER the first five hours, the fast people are out of sight in front and the slow ones are out of sight behind - if, that is, they have not already retired, once they hit the thigh-deep squashy grass coming down off Cairnsgarroch. So the ones you overtake are the inexperienced who've started too fast. For them, the engrossing struggle with exhaustion and self-doubt starts here, at the climb onto the Kells, barely ten miles into the event.

But even here, overtaking is a slow and sociable process, stretching over several hills. And once we reach the long grassy crest, with the rocky crags eastwards where the goats lurk, and the view westwards to the grey granite and the silver lochans, our newcomer seems to forget that thigh-high tussocky bit, the grim struggle with the bracken on Darou. After nine miles of goat-like gambolling along the high Rhinns of Kells comes the plunge though the forest down to Loch Doon, where even Harveys' fling up their theodolite and say you're on your own, mate. The descent is a complex game of chance. Drop in a whole lot of hillrunners at the top; shake them up thoroughly; and they all pop out at the bottom in a completely different order.

At the bottom, we jog the track, pine needles gradually working their way down inside and dropping out of our trouser bottoms, to the first of Glyn's tricks of clockwork.

The rules of the event have over the years, become positively theological, as Glyn attempts to arrange salvation for all entrants from top hill-runners to the slow but serious. This is the first of three bedrooms. If you arrive after 5pm, you *may* turn off your stopwatch and stay the night; if you arrive after 8pm, you *have to* stay the night; while we who arrive at four are *not allowed* to go to bed, but have up to thirty minutes free time in which to eat the nectarines and home-made fruit cake. This means we have the chance to make the acquaintance of runners in front, even as the Doonside midges make their acquaintance with us.

Five miles of flat forest road is a challenge of a different sort, to be run while digesting nectarines in the fading light, and we make a mess of it through the pine prickles, ending up coming downhill onto a side-ride to meet two runners from ten minutes ahead coming up - yes, they made even more of a mess of it. And then a surprise bit-in-the-ankle from Galloway: the two small hills of Shiel and Craigmashieenie, grey rock and deep orange grass. Lose a shoe in the moss at this time of night and you'll still be looking for it when the sun comes up.

7pm, and here's the second optional dormitory. Under the rules, we aren't *obliged* to stop, but *can* if we like. And the light is fading. And the third dormitory, supposing we found it in the dark, would leave only ten miles for tomorrow; and the ridge of Tarfessock is, anyway, utterly inviting. There's a huge comfy granite boulder to lean against; soft orange grass to lie down on; a lochan reflecting the fading of the day; and a dozen tired and happy hill runners for social intercourse.

If you pass the third dormitory before eight, you can complete the whole thing in one, and it is only 42 miles so why not? Two entrants, confident in their ability to do just that, had equipped themselves with just plastic bivvy-bags. Two entrants are now settling down to an uncomfortable plastic night.

I set out at dawn or slightly earlier, hoping to finish inside 24 hours. Nonsense in competitive terms, but good sense in the matter of blood red sunrises, of early mist pooling above Loch Enoch. And down in the Galloway heartland, the people on the short route have trampled a nice path around the silvery lochans, through the heather and the swamps.

The short route? It's half the length of the full circuit, over ground that's twice as tough. 31 of the 70 starters found that they could satisfy their appetite for granite moorland, silver-sanded beaches and heather bog without needing to consume all of the 20 miles and 6000 feet offered. Our route around the grassy perimeter has been higher but less intensely Galloway.

And so along the final grassy, rocky ridge and along the rough path at the back of Loch Trool. With runners and walkers arriving in every hour of the 24, the finish meal is a combination breakfast/luñch/supper lasting all day. Hungry runners feed on fruit cake, while hungry midges feed on runners.

Because of the complicated time allowances, nobody knows who's 'won', but one had squeezed past the third bivvy-point before the eight o'clock bedtime, to subject himself to the very special experience of Galloway heartland in the dark - thus spoiling any chance he'd have had for a prize, except that Glyn had that in mind all along so he gets a prize anyway.

Results? It depends what you mean by results. I don't know whether I came 7th or 17th. I do know I had 42 miles of great Galloway running on Britain's only bivvy-bag endurance event. The next one's in 1996.

Ronald Turnbull