

## Bruce's Crown '96

After my first Bruce's Crown in 1994, I swore never, ever again. So why was I so sure that one was enough ?

For those of you unfamiliar with Bruce's Crown, let me summarise. It's a two day event in the Galloway Hills featuring dense impenetrable forests, huge tussocks of grass, demon midges, a bivvy site from hell, a lot of miles (50 of them) and lot of climb (13,000 feet of it). So why was I back for Bruce's Crown 1996 ?

Well first of all, it's a very clever ploy of Glyn (the organiser) to only run the event every two years. This allows enough time for the mental and physical scars to heal. Combine this with a change of route (only 42 miles !) and change of bivvy site. Well it couldn't have been all that bad. Could it ?

On the day I was joined by some of the Carnethy "usual suspects" that this kind of event attracts. Inken Blunk, Nigel Rose with me in Bruce's Crown, plus John Coyle, Mark Johnston and Alex Menarry in The Heart of Granite. The Heart of Granite is a shorter challenge (20 miles) but requires to be completed in a day. Hopefully an account of that particular event appears somewhere else in this Newsletter.

### BC - Day 1

At 9.20am on August 31st we were on our way from Caldots Campsite. Back in 1994 my first Bruce's Crown did not start well and I had trouble getting through the forest on to the first hill. This time I just followed the crowd because the leaders seemed to know a good line. Not trying to navigate myself was obviously a good strategy because soon we were above the forest and on to the Minnigaf hills. Conditions were good and it felt great to be up and away from the campsite.

The field was soon strung out as we made our way east to Mulldonoch (CP1). From there the climb up to Lamanchan Hill took us into well into the Minnigaf hills. As we came to the eastern end of the Minnigafs it was time to say goodbye to the HoG competitors. They were swinging north to the Dungeon hills. We would be heading north east to the hills of the Rhinns of Kells, after a minor detour south to Drigmorn Hill (CP5). The choice of route to Drigmorn was either a high contour or a drop into the valley to the south and a stiff climb out. I opted to drop down and follow the valley track. I had left Nigel on the ridge, he chose the high contour. As I neared the top of the climb I realised I had gone too far south. I ran back to the checkpoint, cursing my poor judgement. I arrived at the checkpoint just as Nigel was about to leave.

I then saw Inken and Nigel several times as I headed towards the Rhinns of Kells. Before reaching there you have to cross Cairnaroch (CP7) and the descent off is really the first taste of how extreme Galloway can be. Huge tussocky grass and the first serious forest-bashing. On this descent I met up with Nigel and we got a fairly good line down through the forest to the track. On running barely 200 yds of the track, Inken suddenly appeared out of the forest !

Already I was suffering from heel erosion and stopped at Dee Brig (CP8) to apply treatment. Meanwhile Inken and Nigel bashed on. Soon going again, I saw them halfway up the climb to the Rhinns of Kells. Once up on the ridge the going underfoot improved considerably and the next five miles along the ridge took in Meikle Millyea, Milldown,

Millfire and Corserine (CP13). At Carlin's Cairn the weather closed in so I decided to keep closer contact with a group up ahead, which again included Inken and Nigel.

We pretty much stayed together till the end of the ridge at Corran of Portmark (CP15). People had different ideas about how to tackle the forest below, which was between us and the first bivvy site. Nigel and I decided to head straight for a large firebreak. Inken and another competitor decided to double back to try and cut out some of the forest. I reckon Nigel chose a pretty good line through the forest and we emerged unscathed to meet the forest track which would lead us to the bivvy site. After running along the track for a few minutes, Inken again appeared from a another track further along.

Soon we arrived at the first bivvy site in Gala Lane (CP16). My plan was to bivvy there because it's about half way, but as the minutes passed I realised the midges were hellish. It was around 5.30pm and still well within the time control to allow us to carry on to the second bivvy site. I had a concern about making it there in daylight, but I was prepared to risk it. I told Nigel I was carrying on and he had already decided likewise, so shortly before 6.00pm we both set off. We had only about 2.5 hours of useful daylight left and it was 10 miles to the second bivvy.

We started well making good progress along the forest track. Soon we arrived at the site of the 1994 BC bivvy site (the one from hell !). We thought we had found the correct firebreak in the forest to take us up on to the hillside. This didn't go quite so smoothly as we expected. We could see the trig point on Shiel Hill (CP17) but couldn't quite see how to get to it. Eventually we found a line through the forest. With light fading, we headed on to Craigmasherie (CP18).

By the time we were over Craigmasherie it was getting dark and I was knackered. I considered my options. Number 1, was to bash on to the second bivvy site, but this still involved climbing two hills, Shalloch on Minnoch (768m) and Tarfessock (697m). Option number 2, was to stop. I remembered the two hills from 1994 and I was stopping at the next available spot. I explained my position to Nigel and he decided that staggering through tussocks in the pitch dark was not a good idea, so he joined me. We quickly found a spot suitably high and broke camp. As the darkness surrounded us we fired up our stoves and merrily cooked our pasta by headtorch ! We reckoned that the marshals at the second bivvy site would not be unduly concerned as we had paired up and were experienced competitors from previous years. I drifted off to sleep content that we had broken the back of BC by covering 29 miles today.

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### BC - Day 2

We awoke before seven o'clock on Sunday and soon tea was brewing and porridge bubbling. This was BC alright, but on our terms. I treated my heel erosion once more, but no need to cut off the back of my shoes as in 1994. Shortly after seven o'clock we were off.

The ground across to Shalloch on Minnoch (CP19) consisted of large tussocks and boggy patches so I think our decision to leave it till daylight was wise. The hill was still a \*\*\*\*\* and it was now misty. On to Tarfessock the adjoining hill and we were now

traveling the Range of the Awful Hand. We dropped off the main ridge in search of the second bivvy site. After wandering around the main lochan we could see no trace of the marshals or the checkpoint. So we bashed onwards and upwards back on to the ridge and to the steepest climb of the event, Kirriereoch (CP22).

The weather cleared sufficiently to see the Merrick (CP23), the high point of BC at 843m. Coming off the Merrick we were into new territory, with the route swinging east towards the Dungeon hills. We finally made human contact at the third manned checkpoint at Craig Neldricken (CP24). We discovered that the marshals were still at the second bivvy site, and that we had been looking in the wrong place ! But even with our slightly leisurely bivvy, we were still ahead of quite a few "competitors", so they were not detained on our behalf. A nice run off the ridge from Craig Neldricken took us past Loch Neldricken and across Murder Hole ! Only one more serious climb to come. Craignine and the Buchan (CP27) followed by the Loch Trool path and the finish.

After travelling all morning without meeting any runners we caught up with two guys ahead, only to be caught by two guys behind. So the descent off the Buchan would be fast and furious with a race to the finish. Well it would be for them, we stopped halfway down, to eat some food. Ah let them go !

The path on the south side of Loch Trool is...wait did I say path ? We tried to run as best we could. But the track (which is Southern Upland Way track) is continually interrupted by patches of slippery boulders. Towards the end the route the path improved and we manage to trot into the Caldon's campsite. We were momentarily disorientated by the sudden jolt back into civilisation, and had to be pointed in the right direction towards the little campsite hut and the finish.

Tea, and the most wonderful sandwiches were soon consumed. We recalled our adventure to Glyn and he did not seem unduly worried that we had made our own bivvy arrangements. After a hot shower we returned to the hut for ice cream and fruit. Well we deserved it, didn't we.

Jim McWhinnie

#### Heart of Granite

|             |                            |                  |
|-------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| 1st         | Andrew Davies (Borrowdale) | 5-02             |
| 2nd         | John Coyle                 | 5-33             |
| 3rd         | Mark Johnston              | 5-43             |
| 20th        | Alex Menarry               | 8-14             |
| 35 finished |                            | 34 retired !!!!! |

#### Bruce's Crown

|             |                             |            |
|-------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| 1st         | Keith Adams (Westerlands ?) | 11-11      |
| 16th        | Inken Blunk                 | 16-23      |
| 25th        | Nigel Rose                  | 17-52      |
| 25th        | Jim McWhinnie               | 17-52      |
| 35 finished |                             | 12 retired |

PS: Dave Wallace who finished 9th in BC deserves a mention because he didn't bivvy and finished the course the same night at 10:47pm. His running time was 12-51.

A Conundrum from Willie G.

Are Andy's PBs wearing Thin ?

or

Is Thin wearing Andy's PBs ?