

And The Sun Shone : The 50th Three Peaks Race : 25th April 2004 from Graham Breeze

Just Turning up to Race

It is a refreshing aspect of fellrunning that some races can be organised virtually out of a car boot. The organiser arrives, followed by competitors who run up and down a hill or two, log a time, share the *craic* at a prize giving and go home content.

Organising the Three Peaks Race is different. Hopefully everyone goes home equally fulfilled but only those who are part of the Three Peaks Race Association which organises the event can fully appreciate the work that goes into underpinning the apparently effortless and magnificent execution of each year's race. Around eighty marshals turn out on race day to secure the safety of runners and they are just one aspect of the nine months of work involved in setting up the race. There are the dozens of farmers over whose land the race passes to be consulted and who later attend a Social Evening paid for by the Association. There is the Yorkshire Dales National Park authority, the Police, the community of Horton, Rescue Teams, Catering, Parking, Marquees, Toilets, Time Keeping, Raynet, Ambulances, etc.

And in addition to all this for 2004 the Association promised to turn the 50th race into a celebration. Nothing was left to chance and only the weather remained outside its control. In 1981 snow 6-8 feet deep in Horton meant The Three Peaks Race had had to be postponed until October and in 2002 the weather was so bad that 57 runners were treated for hypothermia.

But for the 50th race the sun shone and shone and for most runners avoiding sunburn became a primary concern.

The Association had fulfilled its promise.

The Booklet

Presented to every runner, VIP and helper on the day was a 20-page colour booklet, produced by Dave Hodgson (President of the Association), to be a permanent record and celebration of the race. The contents included:

Introduction by Dave Hodgson

History by Douglas Croft

Fifty Years of Three Peaks Racing by Bill Smith

Organisation by Graham Maud

What it Feels Like to Win-Quotations from 17 winners

Winners: a complete 49 years list

21 Completions- a list of all who have achieved this landmark

Records/Awards/Race Profile, etc

+ a list of all 625 entries for 2004.



The booklet also contained dozens of photographs ranging over the complete history of the race, many of which were provided by Peter Hartley who was Official Photographer on race day.

Around 700 copies of the booklet were distributed and the remaining copies are now available for purchase for £2.00 post free (See display box).

The History (with thanks to Bill Smith)

The man responsible for inaugurating the Three Peaks Race was a Lancastrian, Fred Bagley of Preston Harriers, a keen fellwalker and competitor in the Lake District Mountain Trial. The date was Sunday April 24th 1954 and the race began outside the Hill Inn at Chapel-le-Dale. Bagley arrived first at Ribbleshead after 2 ½ hours running but then struck a bad patch on the steep ascent of Wherside. This did not deter him, however, and his triumphant return to the Hill Inn was accomplished with a time of 3hrs 48 mins, Bradshaw taking second place in 4hrs 06mins, whilst his Clayton clubmate Alf Case finished 3rd in 5hrs. 12mins.

Preston Harriers again promoted the 1955 race but the next eight events were organised by Clayton-le-Moors Harriers, one of whose members, George Brass, set new records in both 1955 (3.28.45) and 1958 (3.08.25), whilst Jack Bloor (Leeds Harehills), who had helped to pioneer the route as a run in 1948/49 triumphed in 1956. The 1959 winner Frank Dawson (Salford) created a Three Peaks landmark the following year by becoming the first man to complete the course inside 3 hours, clocking 2.58.33. Runner up on this occasion was Dave Hodgson, a position he was to achieve thrice more, whilst 4th man home was Geoff Garnett(Bingley).

Dawson's record stood for four years before it was broken by Peter Hall (Barrow). Hall was one of the best fell runners of the 1960s and also excelled on road, track and country. However, his mark of 2.53.00 was to stand for one year only, then it was reduced to 2.47.00 by another outstanding fell runner of that era, Mike Davies (Reading), who completed a run of four consecutive victories in 1968 with a splendid 2.40.34 circuit.

1969 witnessed the closest finish yet between two more great all-rounders, Colin Robinson(Rochdale) and Jeff Norman (Altrincham), the former prevailing by 13 seconds with a time of 2.44.44. Norman, who seven years later became our fastest marathon runner at the Montreal Olympics, now embarked on an as yet unbeaten run of six straight wins which included four new records, the fastest being 2.29.53 in the bad conditions of 1974. With the steadily-rising number of competitors and supporters, the Hill Inn venue was now deemed too small to cope and the start/finish was therefore moved to Horton-in-Ribblesdale. The Pennine Way route was followed to Penyghent and Norman set a new mark of 2.41.37 for the revised course.

The rain, wind and mist of the 1978 race resulted in Ted Pepper (Blackheath), a newcomer to fell racing, dying from exposure after going astray coming off Ingleborough and safety measures were increased following this tragic incident. Three-times runner-up Harry Walker (Blackburn) achieved the first of his three victories that year and it is worth noting that his son, Dave Walker (Clayton), won last year's

race. In 1980, Mike Short (Horwich), became engaged in a thrilling duel with Colin Donnelly (Aberdeen University) which climaxed with Donnelly leading up the last little climb of the Beecroft pastures, only to be caught at the top by the Lancashire lad who then stormed down into the Horton sportsfield to win by 5 seconds in 2.43.32. John Wild (RAF Cosford), set a new record of 2.37.30 for the Horton course in the perfect conditions of 1982, though with the Sell Gill diversion being introduced the following year, the new mark of 2.53.34 was established by the reinstated ex-guides racer, Kenny Stuart (Keswick).

Runner-up on the latter occasion was Hugh Symonds, who won the next two Three Peaks Races in record-breaking times of 2.50.34 and 2.49.13 respectively and achieved this third record of 3.00.01 in 1987 following the introduction of yet another diversion beyond Ribbleshead the previous year. 1988 saw the first victory by a Yorkshireman since Jack Bloor's 32 years earlier and the man responsible, Ian Ferguson (Bingley) also lowered Symonds' record to 2.57.29 on a fine day. Shaun Livesey (Rossendale) bettered this time by nearly 6 minutes with his second win the following year, though Ferguson was to notch up two more victories in 1991 and '92, setting another new record of 2.51.41 on the former occasion, with another Yorkshireman, Gary Devine (Pudsey & Bramley) having triumphed in 1990.

The narrowest victory yet was achieved in 1993 by the Thirlmere shepherd, Gavin Bland (Borrowdale), over another Cumbrian athlete, Mark Roberts (Kendal). Mark Croasdale (Lancaster & Morecambe) had actually held a 5 minute lead on Ingleborough but had then faded to eventually finish 4th, though he was to later redeem himself by winning the 1999 race. Meanwhile, the strongly-running Bland had surged into the lead to finally pip Roberts by only 4 seconds with a time of 3.05.17. The next three races witnessed the first true hat-trick of victories by a Yorkshireman, Andy Peace (Bingley), who also holds the distinction of being the only athlete to achieve the unique "double" of winning both the Three Peaks fell and cyclo-cross races – not once but twice: 1995/1996. In his last victory, the day after he'd competed in the National Road Relays, he set the current record of 2.46.03.

Another Bingley Harrier, Ian Holmes, the outstanding fell champion of recent years, triumphed in 1997, with Mark Roberts (now representing Borrowdale) prevailing over Mark Horrocks (Clayton) by the narrow margin of 11 seconds in the gruelling conditions of the following year. A very warm day in 2000 saw another Borrowdale runner, Simon Booth, defeating Ian Holmes by over a minute, the same man besting his clubmate Andrew "Scoffer" Schofield in the inclement weather of 2002.

The first ladies' race over the Three Peaks course took place in 1979 when Jean Lochhead (Airedale and Spen Valley) defeated an 11 strong field with a time of 3.43.12, which was subsequently lowered to 3.35.34 a year later by her clubmate, Sue Parkin, a champion orienteer.

A new mark of 4.08.01 to allow for the Sell Gill diversion was jointly established in 1983 by Wendy Dodds (Clayton), an outstanding long-distance mountain runner, and Carol Walkington (Horwich), who again emerged triumphant three years later. Another Clayton Harrier, Vanessa Brindle (now married to clubmate Tony Peacock) began her run of four victories in five years in 1985, with a new record of 3.38.10. She then set a new mark of 3.44.05 for the Ribbleshead diversion route two years later and successively lowered it over the next two years to 3.32.43 in 1989.

This record was decisively shattered by Olympic marathon runner Sarah Rowell (Leeds) in her 1991 debut race, clocking 3.16.29 in misty conditions. She reduced this mark even further to 3.16.17 in her fourth victory five years later, when she finished 20th overall in good conditions. Another outstanding athlete, Bingley's Carol Greenwood (nee Haigh), achieved three wins between 1993 and 1998, experiencing a severe ducking in the rampaging waters of Little Dale Beck on the first occasion, while in 1999 Sarah Rowell was outpaced by 7 minutes by another great champion, Angela Mudge (Carnethy), who became the second-fastest lady with 3.20.17 clocking, gaining her 11th position overall.

It is of interest to note that Three Peaks Race winners have included twelve male and six lady FRA champions, three also having been World Mountain Running Champions (Stuart, Greenwood and Mudge).

The Day

Royal Ascot is as much about hats as horses and for the 50th anniversary the organisers had a celebration in mind as well as the fell race. Accordingly past winners, officials and others associated with the race over the past 51 years were invited as honoured guests.

So Stan Bradshaw, second in the first race 51 years ago, was there and so was fellow Clayton-le-Moors member, Alf Case who was third and who went on to become the Secretary of the Association up to the 21st race. Harry and David Walker, the only father and son winners were present. Other past winners invited included Ian Ferguson, Jeff Norman, Vanessa Peacock, Jean Rawlinson, Sarah Rowell and Hugh Symonds, widows Pat Bloor and Lillian Brass, and Alan Heaton who, with Stan Bradshaw, was the first to achieve 21 completions. Chronicler Bill Smith, long time helpers Ralph & Molly Howson and Jim & Sheila Millman representing the Horton Playing Fields Committee, representatives from past sponsors Pace plc and the Daily Mirror and Horton Quarry (Hanson) who had subsidised the Celebratory Booklet. And so on.

So whilst the drama on the fells was being played out under the searing sun, VIP guests were relaxing over a buffet and taking in the celebratory ambience of a wonderful day.

The Three Documentaries

In 1976 Yorkshire Television made a documentary about the race based around a young reporter, Roger Greenwood, who had decided as a New Year Resolution to compete in the race a few months later. This he did in 4.09.16 (281st out of 319 finishers), which was some way behind the 2.43.59 of John Calvert (Blackburn) registering his first victory, following Jeff Norman's (Altrincham) six consecutive wins.



In 1993 Roger Greenwood produced his own documentary which is remembered for Gavin Bland (Borrowdale) sprinting for victory at the end of the race and the previous leader Mark Croasdale (Lancaster & Morecambe) going from first to fourth on the Ingleborough section to a soundtrack of REM's "Everybody Hurts".

For 2004 and the 50th Anniversary Yorkshire Television waived their copyright restrictions and allowed both films to be viewed freely in the VIP marquees. More importantly Roger Greenwood returned to film a further and excellent half-hour documentary "The 50th Three Peaks Race" which was screened by Yorkshire Television on May 6th.

One event and three television documentaries? Something special for sure !

The Cutting Edge of Technology

Anyone peering into the results tent may have idly wondered why it bore a resemblance to Mission Control in Houston. The answer is that a world first was in the making because for the first time ever a linking of the Sportident recording and Raynet radio systems allowed real time tracking of runners as they passed through every checkpoint. Those monitoring the race in the results tent therefore knew the instant that every runner had passed through the five intermediate checkpoints.

It might have been thought by some that after 50 years the Three Peaks Association could be getting a little set in its ways but, on the contrary, it has chosen to use its status and resources to invest in and advance the cause of greater safety on the fells, and this should be recognised and applauded.

The Runners

For environmental reasons there is a limit on race entries and although the Association accepted 625 entries it was known that no-shows on race day would reduce the actual number starting to an acceptable level. The entry limit was actually achieved seven weeks before race day.

Bill Wade, the Entries Secretary, produces an annual report analysing the race entry. In common with other long fell races the Three Peaks Race has recently suffered from a relative decline in entries, although not to the same extent as races such as Wasdale and Ennerdale which now form part of the Lakeland Classics Trophy. The massive entry for the 50th race was clearly untypical but the fact that well over 600 runners applied (because notices were placed on websites when the race was full it is not known how many more applications would have been received) can only be welcomed. It is perhaps also worth noting that the Three Peaks Race is not a media circus that attracts flippant entries but a serious challenging event. Bill Wade does not accept entries from pantomime horses.

The analysis of the 625 who entered (of which 508 started and 407 finished) also provides some encouragement in the category make up of competitors compared with 2003 when there were 291 pre-entries. For 2004:

* Ladies rose to 12.5% from 10%, which is the highest ever proportion of the field

* Newcomers rose to 38% from 22%

* The number of runners aged under 25 rose from 2 in 2003 to 16, mostly male, including one 20 year old.

Nevertheless, despite the encouraging number of younger entries, the average age of male entries remains at 44 years and 39 for ladies.

The Race

Dave Hodgson, when introducing proceedings, suggested that the day had attracted the most outstanding quality entry in the history of the race because, in addition to celebrating its 50th Anniversary, the race also determined the Yorkshire Championships and was a counter for the English Championship. Not surprisingly the start line was packed with past winners.

Perhaps not unexpectedly it was a past winner who won again but delightfully that winner was Andy Peace (Bingley). Andy who won in 1994/95/96 but had not entered since, set off at a storming pace, despite the heat, chasing Ian Holmes (1997 winner) and by the top of Pen-y-Ghent was already 22 seconds ahead of his club-mate, followed by Rob Jebb (Bingley) and the Borrowdale pair, Simon Booth (2000/2002 winner) and Mark Roberts (1998 winner).

Andy never lost the lead and although Simon closed up with him on Whernside to show just a 3 seconds deficit at the Hill Inn, Peace eventually won in 2.55.46 with Booth finishing in 2.56.38. Holmes was well adrift in 3.02.38 and Roberts was 4th in 3.07.03. Rob Jebb dropped out at an early stage with a hamstring problem.

With a 100% record of wins from his three previous entries Andy had more than most to lose in reputation and had trained for the race. Commentators had observed his superb form earlier in the year and this victory, after a seven-year gap, suggests that had he continued to enter the event the record six consecutive wins of Jeff Norman may have been eclipsed long ago.

The joy of the Sportident system is the comprehensive picture it presents of the split times for all runners. There are six "legs" in the race and Peace was fastest on three of them: the three climbs !

Before the race Duncan Overton (Keswick) was interviewed to camera and with prescience observed, "with a race like this it's always about getting round, that's the first thing. After that getting round quickly. After that beating everyone else in your age group".

"Getting round" mattered in the ladies' race where Andrea Priestley (Ilkley) at Ribbleshead Viaduct was over 3 minutes ahead of the 2003 English and British Champion Louise Sharp (Keswick), who was competing in the event for the first time. But by the top of Whernside Louise was 2 minutes ahead of Andrea who dropped out at the Hill Inn. Louise went on to win in 3.39.49 (57th overall) almost fourteen minutes ahead of 85th Sharon Taylor (Bingley) in 3.53.30 and 97th Sue Beconsall (Bingley) in 3.58.31.

The ladies' race has now had eight different winners in the past nine years in contrast with the period in the late 1980s/early 1990s when Vanessa Peacock, Carol Greenwood and Sarah Rowell were sequential multiple winners.

If getting an entry for the 2004 race was a triumph, finishing it proved to be beyond many who went to the start line and 101 of the 508 suffered the indignity of retiring or being timed out to be ferried back to the start in the minivans provided by the organisers. As the driver of one van drolly observed, "you don't get much conversation on the way back to Horton from the runners who have retired". Perhaps they were all soberly and quietly reflecting that, as one runner commented to camera before the race start, "One's time does not really matter. It is always a wonderful celebration to get round because the Three Peaks is the greatest fell race in Britain !"

The Presentation

The impressive array of silverware on display before the awards ceremony is an adequate reminder that the Three Peaks Race has a pedigree and the major awards are listed below. It is a tradition that men who have completed the race 21 times receive a special award but Wendy Dodds, who was a joint winner in 1983 with Carol Walkington (Horwich), was presented with her award after 15 completions. No other woman has yet achieved 15 completions. However at the 2004 race Wendy achieved her 21st completion and the Association presented her with another award to recognise this further unique and outstanding achievement.

The Next One

Earlier paragraphs referred to the hundreds of people whose work ensures the success of each Three Peaks Race. For the 51st race (Sunday 24th April 2005) the Association hopes that many of those who have now experienced their first Peaks will return. It is always easier the second time.

Perhaps some of the hundreds of runners who enjoyed the occasion of the 50th race might wish to play some part in helping to put the event on in future years and they are invited to ring Paul Dennison, who is Chairman of The Three Peaks Race Association, on 01943 872020, for an informal chat on how they can put something back into the sport.

Finally, whilst the Association cannot guarantee that runners in 2005 will be featured in the media next year, as everyone knows, the euphoria of getting round the Three Peaks Race beats appearing on TV anyway!

Major Prize-winners & Results

| | | | |
|---|----------------|------------------|---------|
| Winner | Andy Peace | Bingley | 2.55.46 |
| 1 st Lady (57 th) | Louise Sharp | Keswick | 3.39.49 |
| 1 st Team | Borrowdale | | |
| 1 st Man Over 40 (4 th) | Mark Roberts | Borrowdale | 3.07.03 |
| 1 st Man Over 50 (47 th) | Steve Jackson | Horwich | 3.35.13 |
| 1 st Man Over 60 (61 st) | Geoff Howard | Ilkley | 3.41.41 |
| 1 st Lady Over 40 (97 th) | Sue Becconsall | Bingley | 3.58.31 |
| 1 st Lady Over 50 (165 th) | Wendy Dodds | Clayton-le-Moors | 4.15.35 |
| 1 st Veteran Team | Holmfirth | | |
| 1 st Lady Team | Bingley | | |
| 1 st Yorkshire Man (1 st) | Andy Peace | Bingley | 2.55.46 |
| 1 st Lancashire Man (8 th) | Paul Thompson | Clayton-le-Moors | 3.10.16 |
| 1 st Newcomer (6 th) | Nick Sharp | Ambleside | 3.07.49 |
| 1 st Under 25 (7 th) | Simon Bailey | Staff. Moorlands | 3.09.11 |

Copies of the Celebratory Booklet are available for £2 post free from:
Dave Hodgson, 197, Hall Lane, Horsforth, Leeds, LS18 5EG
0113 258 5586

Leading Positions

| | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|---------|
| 1 A Peace | Bingley | 2.55.46 |
| 2 S Booth | Borrowdale | 2:56.38 |
| 3 I Holmes | Bingley | 3.02.38 |
| 4 M Roberts V40 | Borrowdale | 3.07.03 |
| 5 J Davies | Borrowdale | 3.07.22 |
| 6 N Sharp | Ambleside | 3.07.49 |
| 7 S Bailey | Staffs. Moorlands | 3.09.11 |
| 8 P Thompson | Clayton-le-Moors | 3.10.16 |
| 9 A Schofield | Borrowdale | 3.11.10 |
| 10 C Stead | Northumberland | 3.13.40 |

V40

| | | |
|--------------|-----------|---------|
| 16 C Roberts | Kendal | 3.19.28 |
| 23 T McGaff | Pennine | 3.23.13 |
| 26 K Harding | Tring | 3.23.57 |
| 27 J Rank | Holmfirth | 3.24.33 |

V50

| | | |
|--------------|---------|---------|
| 47 S Jackson | Horwich | 3.35.13 |
|--------------|---------|---------|

| | | | | |
|----|-----------|------------------|--|---------|
| 56 | D Overton | Keswick | | 3.39.46 |
| 74 | K Carr | Clayton-le-Moors | | 3.50.23 |
| 80 | P Clark | Kendal | | 3.51.47 |
| 82 | D Tait | Dark Peak | | 3.52.56 |

V60

| | | | | |
|-----|----------|------------------|--|---------|
| 61 | G Howard | Ilkley | | 3.41.41 |
| 133 | P Covey | Pudsey & Bramley | | 4.08.16 |
| 201 | D Lucas | Rochdale | | 4.23.03 |

Ladies

| | | | | |
|-----|---------------|------------------|-----|---------|
| 57 | L Sharp | Keswick | | 3.39.49 |
| 85 | S Taylor | Bingley | | 3.53.30 |
| 97 | S Becconsall | Bingley | V40 | 3.58.31 |
| 110 | S Dolan | Harrogate | V40 | 4.01.17 |
| 124 | J Smith | Calder Valley | | 4.05.02 |
| 144 | H Sedgwick | Ilkley | | 4.11.34 |
| 155 | K Bailey | Bingley | | 4.14.01 |
| 165 | W Dodds | Clayton-le-Moors | V50 | 4.15.35 |
| 167 | A Brockington | Saddleworth | | 4.16.17 |
| 182 | J Mellor | Pennine | | 4.17.55 |