

Pubs and Fellrunning

This is a subject very, very dear to my heart and you only have to have a quick look through the Calendar to realise the close and valued connection between pubs and our chosen sport. Not only do myriads of races state pubs as their venues but many are actually named after them and many more hold their post-race Prizegivings in them.

*Many of my fondest memories are nothing to do with the race, run or whatever - they are centred on the events in the pub afterwards; sitting chatting in front of a blazing fire in the Boar's Head after soaking wet, wind-blasted, freezing training runs; enjoying the noisy afternoon in the King's Head when half of Borrowdale Fellrunners took over the pool room to watch an England international rugby match; watching with astonishment as Mari Todd turned out to be the stirring bagpiper who led the clientele of the Patterdale Hotel outside to welcome in the New Year; feeling eternally grateful to the landlord of the Horseshoe, who welcomed four money-less, near hypothermic fellrunners into his vault one appalling winter's day, stoked up the fire, fed them hot soup and sandwiches and then beer until they'd thawed out sufficiently for two of them to run back for the car and the cash - I have a host of memories of occasions such as these, as I am sure do lots of you, so we have below a little collection of pub stories from the Peak District, the Lake District, Ireland and Scotland. There was supposed to be one from Wales as well but there isn't - which may be a comment on Welsh pubs !!**!*

Saddleworth Runners - A Drinking Club with a Running Problem from Bruce Bridgestock

Saddleworth Running Club, like many fell running clubs, is a collection of slightly eccentric people who enjoy a range of activities in the great outdoors, come from a wide range of social backgrounds and jobs, are of all ages and income brackets but have a common interest that draws them all together - BEER! However it seems we also have a drive to run, maybe it is to avoid a guilt complex by feeling that at least we did something to deserve the ale!

The origins, continued existence of, and many of the events and activities of SRC revolve around pubs. One pub and one event in particular stand out as central to the club organisation and culture in many ways. The Cross Keys pub above Uppermill in Saddleworth is a traditional English inn, dating from 1745. The pub is in a wonderful position high above Uppermill village and just below the Pots and Pans obelisk at the end of the Saddleworth Moors. The pub has for many years been owned by Lees brewery of Oldham. In 1979 Phil and Pat Kay moved back from Anglesey to manage the Cross Keys.

Also around this time Frank Sykes of Dobcross was running with East Cheshire Harriers but was more interested in fell running. Frank had developed some particular views about race organisation and had become intent on organising some races in Saddleworth. Frank set out to put on races that would be safe, well organised, good value for money, as well as fun and challenging.

Sometime in 1980 Frank had been out running on the moors and was dehydrated whilst running home past the Cross Keys. It was mid afternoon and the pub was shut but this was no barrier. He knocked up Pat Kay and, after some persuasion, Frank was given a drink (just orange squash as Pat recalls). This was to be the start of a relationship which hugely influenced fell running in Saddleworth.

Sadly, both Frank and Phil have now passed away but the innovative annual road and fell relay which they initiated continues. Frank and Phil and the contribution they both made to local life, not just running, are often remembered.

In 1981 the Saddleworth Running Club was formed. Ian Brierley was a local runner and one evening sat with Roger Devy and Roger Jones in the Diggle Hotel. Over a few pints the SRC was created. The two Rogers continued with other clubs for a while, but Ian, along with people such as Gerry Royle, Harry and Bob Waterhouse, began to run together and then take refreshment in 'The Kitchen' at the Cross Keys. In March 1981, before the formation of SRC, Frank put on the first Chew Valley Skyline event. This event went very well and set the standard for future Saddleworth races, focus on safety, smooth organisation,

good routes, refreshments and lots of prizes, low entry fees fast results service (Well maybe the latter took a while to get going !).

Sometime around then Frank and Phil enjoyed an evening in the company of John Willie Lees and had a conversation which led to the Cross Keys Road and Fell Relay race. The conversation may have gone something like this.

FS. Well Phil, this pub's not bad, but it could do with some events to liven it up and bring in some more people, something a bit different, that uses its position on cusp of town and moor and involves the local community.

PK. Err...

FS. You know runners like to drink a bit, especially if they get thirsty by running on a hot summer's day, and if they have to hang around a bit for other runners, and they might bring friends and family along to watch as well.

PK Ahh..

FS. Fell runners and road runners don't mix much so a race that brings them together would be good, and road races are expensive and not very well organised, so we should show them how a race can be organised at low cost, with safety, good prizes, a social event afterwards and fun for all.

PK Oh er....

FS. So we could organise a road and fell relay, get the brewery to sponsor it, have the race and then a disco in the barn afterwards, on the August Bank holiday weekend. What do you think Phil ?

PK Ermm..

FS. Well that's agreed then, the first Cross Keys Road and Fell Relay will take place this August. Come on Phil, drink up, it's your round.

PK. ****



Around this time Frank and the newly born SRC came together and by the time the first Cross Keys Road and Fell relay took place it was an SRC organised event.

Lees brewery really came up trumps and the winning team from Holmfirth had so much beer to take home they could not get it all in the car.

The event was well supported and families and friends did indeed come along. Three teams of local ladies turned out to run for the first and in most cases the last, time. Pat Kay and the pub staff were kept very busy making sandwiches and serving beer all afternoon.

The tradition of a class for Local Pub Team was started and so the teams became balanced as road running clubs, fell running clubs and local community teams based in pubs. This is pretty much a reflection of the club culture today.

Memories of the early years of the events are that the sun always shone, lots of beer was drunk and won, the disco in the evenings was really well attended, teams came from far and wide, including the mighty Wolverhampton and Bilston Harriers. East Cheshire Harriers have always given great support, mainly due

to the enthusiasm of Harry Kelly, who would bring over several teams, often a lot of 'young lions'. He would run them all round the course to warm up and then give terrific vocal support to all the runners and often a vote of thanks to the organising team. Holmfirth have also been a great supporting club and over the years Holmfirth and ECH have had some great battles for the Cross Keys trophy.

The event was truly a partnership between the running club and the pub. Phil and Pat put in a lot of effort and the Lees brewery gave great support. The event is integral to the Cross Keys and is one of the most unusual and enjoyable events on the SRC calendar, though sadly the team numbers entering have declined and the evening disco no longer runs.

We also hold the annual Christmas Handicap from the Cross Keys, using the barn building which has become the HQ of the Oldham Mountain Rescue Team. The Handicap event is an exercise in the bizarre performed by the ridiculous with the serious intent of trying to understand the rules. Often we are to be seen returning to the pub from the moors, 'cross dressed', pushing prams, bouncing huge balls, or maybe having played a game of massive rugby across the Saddleworth Moors. The pub takes it all in its stride; it has 'seen it all' over the years.

Saddleworth Runners continue to meet in 'The Kitchen' of the Cross Keys, every Tuesday evening. The walls of the pub have many photographs of runners, in particular there are several taken at the first Road and Fell Relay back in 1981, with the sun shining down on the local mayor handing over a large trophy to Holmfirth, the local ladies jogging around in tennis skirts and the runners on the start line. According to Frank's race report the starter pulled the trigger on his starting gun three times, with no effect, before just shouting out 'BANG !!' The runners on that first event set off from the Cross Keys with big smiles on their faces, and today the runners who meet there are still smiling.

With thanks to Pat Kay and Ian Brierley for information and memories. And with eternal thanks to Frank Sykes and Phil Kay.

Selected Results from 1st Cross Keys Road & Fell Relay 29th Aug 1981

Pos.	Team	Road	Fell	Road	Fell	Total
1.	Holmfirth A	16.16	17.26	15.49	18.01	1.07.30
2.	Horwich A	16.43	18.54	16.29	17.37	1.09.43
3.	Salford A	16.02	18.58	17.59	17.52	1.10.51
18.	E.C.Harriers (Boys)	21.52	23.03	20.01	23.24	1.28.20
20	E.C.Harriers (Vets)	17.27	23.38	24.40	24.15	1.30.00
29.	Horwich Ladies	25.20	32.51	33.33	28.16	2.00.00

**The Sligachan Inn and the Glamaig Race
from Keith Burns**

A Friendly Scottish Pub. Now there's an oxymoron for you. I remember, as a 16-year-old in 1958, staggering into the Bridge of Orchy Hotel, knackered and frozen after cycling from Fort William in torrential rain and a south westerly gale. I asked for a pot of tea and biscuits through chattering teeth. "We're closed !" The door slammed in my face. The experience is still burned on my memory. The good news is that things are improving slowly, at the pace of oncoming global warming. So Scotland doesn't have the same strong culture of cosy symbiosis between hill races and pubs. However, we do have a few, and all the more valued for their relative rarity compared to the English scene and by far the most resonant and historical must be the Sligachan Inn on Skye and the Glamaig Race.

Norman Collie first visited Skye in 1886 when most Alpine mountaineers considered the British mountains hardly worthy of their attention. He made the Sligachan Inn his base for his explorations. It was a logical choice when you see the view of Sgurr nan Gilleann and the northern Cuillins from the inn. Until his death in 1942 the island was his spiritual home. He had a distinguished career as a chemist at University College London but the mountains were his first and last love and with John Mackenzie of Sconsor he explored the peaks, revealing the wild inaccuracies of the 1885 one inch Ordnance Survey. He followed the Pilkington brothers' first ascent of the Inaccessible Pinnacle in 1880 by its longer east ridge.

In the summer of 1899, Collie and General Bruce brought Gurkha Harkbir from the Himalaya to explore the Alps. They climbed Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa. Then Collie took them to Skye and the Sligachan Inn. Harkbir hauled them up many climbs on Sgurr Alasdair. It was during their exploration of Coire Lagan that Collie noticed an enormous shadow on the face of Sron na Ciche. It was seven years before he was able to return and identify what was projecting the shadow – "It was a climb full of excitement - - suddenly it came into view and we found ourselves on the end of the knife edge. We sat down on that knife edge and slowly made our way on to the great rock tower at its end. Up this we climbed, and John and I were mightily pleased with our climb." It was Mackenzie who named the tower the Cioch and Collie who gave the name Sron na Ciche to the great face looking down on Coire Lagan.

The estate owner, McLeod of McLeod, heard of an extraordinary run that Gurkha Harkbir had done from the Sligachan to the summit of Glamaig and back in one and a quarter hours. He refused to believe it and had a heated argument with some local gillies (who presumably had witnessed the ascent). Bruce offered to resolve the dispute and asked Harkbir to do it again. He did, and knocked twenty minutes off the alleged one and a quarter hours. It is recorded that he did it in bare feet, which seems implausible to me. Surely a sensible Gurkha who had already explored the local hills would have worn sandals at least.

Climbers of the 1930's were familiar with Collie commuting between the Sligachan and other parts of the island in the yellow Sligachan Rolls Royce. In October 1942 at the age of 83 Collie fell and received a drenching while fishing in Loch Storr. This led to rapid deterioration of his health and he died a few months later. He is buried in Struan Free Presbyterian churchyard alongside John Mackenzie – a delightful spot with views across to the Cuillins.

David Shepherd (a member of Carnethy Hill Running Club) had the inspired idea to commemorate Gurkha Harkbir's run with an annual race from the Inn to Glamaig's summit and back, just as Harkbir had done it. David was tragically killed in a road accident before he was able to set up the race. The race is now a fitting commemoration of David. It is organised by Robin Morris and Carnethy Hill Running Club. The Shepherd family has maintained a link with the race through David's brother, Andrew, competing every year. In 1995 a Gurkha team took the winning place in the race and was the fastest team.

The race is an exciting mixture of leg-sucking bog, steep climb with tumbling boulders, a frantic scree descent with great rafts of moving stones that you sink in whilst staying roughly upright, and a final dash across the swamp back to the Sligachan.

The Sligachan hosts a superb post-race ceilidh and helps to restore your faith in Highland commercial hospitality. Its position close to the northern end of the Cuillin ridge makes it a superb base for exploring. You can camp by the river within staggering distance from the friendly bar which has good beer, food and the occasional fiddle and accordion session. On still summer evenings when you look up at Glamaig from the bar window, you can almost feel the approving spirits of Harkbir, Bruce, Collie and David Shepherd.

Reference; "Norman Collie, A Life in Two Worlds". Christine Mill, Aberdeen University Press.



Glamaig from the Sligachan Inn

My Favourite Fellrunning Pub from Selwyn Wright

My first fell race was the Blisco Dash in November 1976. In the way of the humble student I had hitched up the M6 from Birmingham, where my legal studies and the general mountain-less environment were less than fully stimulating.

Friday night saw the old Saunders Fellpine pitched in its usual spot by the plantation on the N.T site and me enthralled as ever by the antics of the Langdale Festerers in the ODG public bar. Not too much ale of course – not til after the race. Ah the race! I have to say that I don't remember a single thing about it. I know I finished 46th out of about 90 and that the thing was won by Mike Short. This last information is firmly imprinted because I spent most of the Saturday evening in the Stickle Barn with a very happy Mike –who in winning the race became the 'Fellrunner of the Year' (nowadays he would be British Champion).

Until that day I'd never met Mike Short. I can't remember what beer we were drinking – whatever it was it seemed to appear and disappear fairly rapidly – or much else about the pub, but during the course of the evening I was struck by the notion that this was one hell of a sport. When the champion can sit in a pub with an also ran, here was a sport I was immediately keen to make my own. And in the nearly 30 years which have gone by since I haven't seen anything to change my mind !

I wouldn't want anyone to think that the Stickle Barn was my favourite pub though. Pleasant as it is to sup a shandy on the terrace in the evening sun, the place doesn't have the ambience of its near neighbour, which is a strong candidate for the title. An early memory of the ODG is of watching a runner descend from Loft Crag; lie down on a sun bed in the pub car park while several attendants filled him up with rice pudding and changed his socks. After about 10 minutes he jumped up and set off up Blisco with several other attendants carrying torches. Since it was about 3pm and wouldn't get dark for another 7 hours this quite impressed me. I later found out that it was Bill Smith heading towards his 63 peak round.

Back inside the pub that evening Mike Rose and his festering mates were at it again and Mike, bless him, was involving us in the banter. A pub of course is all about its craic, and the ODG had the very best craic of all for about 15 years through the seventies and eighties. Folk would gather from all over the country on a Friday night and the craic would be coming out of your ears. It was inevitable of course, but the place gradually became much too popular and the originals drifted away; "If you're looking too hard for the craic then you'll never find it."

We found it one night in the Wasdale Head Inn - having dropped ignominiously out of the KIMM I had to pawn my watch during the course of the evening. Funny that ! However much you put in your sack to 'cover eventualities' it's never quite enough. I ended up having to run over from Grasmere the following weekend to retrieve the watch and managed to find a load of mates in the 'Screes' down the valley. Anyway you know the score – drink too much; kip behind a wall; wake up soaked; run back to Grasmere wet, hungry and hung over !

There are a few hostelries where you can walk in after years away and just know that you'll find mates. The Clachaig in Glengoe is one; the Scafell in Borrowdale another. There are others which become the epicentre for a single weekend each year; the Jura Hotel; the Newfield; the Royal; the Crown; the Imperial; the Vic; the Nags Head. Ok - I must have caught one or two of you with that list ! Those who've enjoyed a pint or two after the race at both a Cumbrian and a Peak District 'Royal' can have a point, as Jimmy Saville would say.

So, the question is, which is my favourite fellrunning pub ? Well it wouldn't really do to choose the 'Three Shires' (excellent home cooked food, evening and lunchtime; fine ale and reasonable b&b) what with the family running it and all. The answer of course, which won't surprise many, is the Blacksmiths Arms, Broughton Mills, Cumbria – home of the Dunnerdale and Caw races; second home to many fellrunners living in the surrounding district. The Blacksmiths benefits immensely from being a little bit off the beaten track, and tends not to get too packed even at peak times !

Over the years there've been several landlords – many readers will remember Andrew Wood who starred in several continental coach trips to World Trophy races – and even ran in some of the open races (though never completely sober !). Andy was one of a number of British fighter pilots who 'dambusted' their way through the rather nonplussed Austrian village of Telfes during the early stages of one open race. In this respect he can fairly claim to have been led astray by one Dick Wall. That was after a fairly serious session in 'Den Alten Post'. For some of us it was pretty much immediately after the session – for others the race was just a short interval in an extended rep.

Former chairman Norman Berry also distinguished himself in Austria. 'Sexual harassment during an underpant relay' is not a frequent charge against FRA chairmen but the lack of sober witnesses let him get

off 'Scot free'! I really can't say anymore - you'll have to ask someone who was there. (Actually there's got to be another article 'Socialising at the World Trophy' in there somewhere.)

All this and not a word about Gary's dad, Hugh Devine. It is said that in Die (1989) Hugh was held captive by a bartender because P&B couldn't pay the bill. Personally I don't believe it – who could imagine Hughey being kept in a pub against his will ! It is further said that in finally rolling back to his bed Hugh encountered a very focussed Rod Pilbeam in search of breakfast. Son Gary competed for his country later in the day, but by then dad was sound asleep ! (Actually, there's yet another article in there - 'Sessions with Pudsey & Bramley').

*Ed : Unfortunately Selwyn was unable to include the details of his many and scurrilous anecdotes about the Blacksmiths Arms due to the threat of legal proceedings from half the fell-running aficionados of south-west Cumbria !**\$!*

Alcohol & Fell Running (or Artistry in the Irish Pub) from "Bogboy"

Robbie Bryson, World Masters Hill Running Champion 2002, Dermot McGonigle, twice Scottish Fell Running Champion, Deon McNeilly, many times Northern Ireland Fell Running Champion (and silver medallist in the British Cross Country Championships in 1988 out kicked by Eamon Martin) all have a couple of obvious things in common. They all run for Newcastle AC and keep their soul in the Mourne Mountains, but there is something else. They all love their Guinness, by the gallon.

It is an observation that the level of ability to run in the mountains is directly proportional to the ability of the liver to digest alcohol and it is a further observation that fell runners have been testing this theory for years and, as the results are not yet conclusive, the research continues. Of course, the Irish are partial to a Guinness or two, but there is still the ability to shock the locals whenever they discover finely tuned athletes over indulging in a licensed premise. For lovers of fell running, it is part of the religion; the golfers have the nineteenth hole, fell runners have the Guinness (if you're English, Scottish or Welsh, please read 'real ale' or better still 'Deuchars IPA' and you'll keep up faster) but in the shadow of the mountain, it tastes much better than next to the 18th green – fell runners earn it more and so the beer goes down easier.

Of course, the love of the pub post-race is not unique to the Irish fraternity, it is reflected throughout the sport of fell running. The photo below was taken in Newcastle's 'Central Park' on the evening of 3rd April after the Donard-Commedagh race, the first round of the British Championship series. What do we see ? If you're following so far, you'll know the answer already, three recent British Fell Running Champions (and Scoffer) participating in their love of Guinness and, in the interest of sports science, continuing to provide real-life research into the link between the liver and the ability to descend rapidly.



For many years now, the annual Hill & Dale Series in the Mourne Mountains has grown in popularity. On a Thursday night for 11 weeks in a row from the turning of the hour that gives enough evening light (apart from the last race, which is on a Friday night with the leisure activities extending well into Saturday morning) an average of 110+ turn up in the Mournes from all over the country to participate in a race that tends to have a record around the half hour mark. Each race has a unique character, from the faster forest race to the roughest of mountain

terrain. However, each race has one thing in common, the post-race congregation in the pub. The Series and respective pubs with grid references for anyone who wants to visit, after a rewarding run in unspoilt mountainous surroundings, are noted below:

McVeigh Classic	Frankie's, Castlewellan (340350)
Tollymore Forest	Avoca Hotel, Newcastle (377307)
Slieve Martin	Glenside Inn, Rostrevor (181184)
Slieve Binnian	Anchor Bar, Newcastle (376306)
Moughanmore	Doran's Mourneview, Hilltown (225293)
Hen & Cock	Rathfriland (197336)
Monument Race	Frankie's, Castlewellan (340350)
Loughshannagh	Mary Margaret's, Hilltown (223300)
Rocky	Doran's Mourneview, Hilltown (225293)
Meelbeg Meelmore	Maghera Inn (373344)
Donard Forest	Avoca Hotel, Newcastle (377307)

Not everyone comes to the pub, of course, some have to drive maybe two hours home and need to be up early for work on the Friday, however, the headcount still tends to be 80 or 90. The atmosphere is great, stories of the best routes, awful climbs, breakneck descents, getting lost, the excess pounds of the winter, they're all there. Sandwiches; cheese, ham, tuna, salad and many people's favourite, McNeilly's egg and onion – he's not just a good runner ? Feed the stomach, quench the thirst (one sober driver and a group of liquefied passengers enjoying the research) and renew the soul.

So what do we conclude from all of this ? The pub is an integral part of our sport (of course, only if you want it to be) where the best (and we can all continue to live in awe of the best and their ability on the mountains) show that they are mortals like the rest of us. Elitism and fell running are not good bedfellows, our sport is different from many others, the mountain is the true leveller, everyone in the race battles against themselves as well as others and that sense of achievement is felt by all, no matter where you finish. That's the beauty of our sport, that's the beauty of the pub; it's the escapism from the rat race. What about the morning after ? For the Hill & Dale, it's work, but with a better attitude; for the weekend race, it's whether the traditional long slow Sunday run in the hills, forest or sand hills can be approached in a sober enough state.