

FROM AIREDALE TO KENTDALE **A Profile of Rob Jebb and Sharon Taylor** by Bill Smith

Bingley Harriers have boasted several outstanding fell runners in their ranks since the 1950s, including Ronnie Hiley, David Humphreys, Martin Weeks, Bob Whitfield, Ian Ferguson, Mark Croasdale, Andy Peace, Ian Holmes and the late John Taylor; while prominent among the ladies have been Kirstin Bailey, Sue Becconsall, Barbara Carney, Carol Greenwood, Helen Johnson, Pauline Munro and Victoria Wilkinson.

Two of their brightest young stars in recent years have been Rob Jebb and his girlfriend Sharon Taylor.

Baptism At Buckden

Rob was born at Bingley on 28.2.75 and is a British Telecom engineer by trade, currently working from Windermere. He was encouraged to take up the sport by his father Peter, a police constable from Eldwick, near Bingley, though a Lancastrian by birth. Pete came into fell running from mountaineering, initially competing in the 1974 Felisman Hike, an event which he was to win seven years later, and his best performances were achieved in long, rough mountain races like the Karrimor, Capricorn, Mountain Trial and the Ennerdale Horseshoe. He inaugurated the first amateur Buckden Pike race in 1982 and continued to organise it for 20 years, his former Bingley Harriers clubmate Allan Greenwood taking over in 2003. In November this year, however, Pete will be inaugurating a race up another "Fellsman peak", Great Whernside, from Kettlewell. He still competes in fell races as an 0/55 veteran. His sister, the aforementioned Barbara Carney, is a former FRA treasurer and presently assists David Weatherhead to compile the "Results and Reports" section of "The Fellrunner". Rob has two brothers, Adrian, who has followed his father into rock-climbing, and Andrew, who has represented Yorkshire at Rugby Union.

Rob's baptism came in the Buckden Pike junior race, which his father had allowed him to enter, along with his friend Chris Carris, even though they were both under-age. He finished next-to-last but enjoyed the experience. "My father was my early inspiration as a junior and also my coach," he recalls, "but I also trained with the Harriers on Tuesdays for a long run and on Thursdays for speedwork, having joined them in 1984 at the age of nine." He didn't show much promise as a junior and never won a race, though he made the placings several times, with 2nds at Blackstone Edge and Penyghent in 1991 and at Burnsall in 1993, the latter two races being won by his clubmate Matt Whitfield, son of the 1987 English champion, Bob Whitfield. However, an indication of his general form at that time can be found in his 10th position in the 1993 U/18 boys' championship.

A year later, he became a member of Bingley's winning team in the Sheepstones Relay from Mytholmroyd in Calderdale, along with Ian Holmes and Andy Peace, and was 1st Intermediate at Skiddaw in 1995, when he also finished 4th at Halton Gill, 6th at Burnsall and 19th at Ben Nevis, all open senior races: "I had first run the Ben two years earlier as an under-aged 18-year-old, having been inspired to enter by watching my Father and Ian Holmes perform in it." Hard work in training paid off the following year when he came 5th in this classic event, other highlights of that season including 2nd at both Wansfell and the Glen Rosa Horseshoe on Arran, 5th in the Langdale Horseshoe, and 6th in both the Jura and Duddon races. He had achieved his first victory earlier that year in the Keighley Hill Runners' Winter League race from Goose Eye, a 7-mile route out to Keighley Moor Reservoir and back, and during the summer secured his second win in the short up-and-down event at Halton Gill, where he set a new record after cycling 40 miles to reach the venue - plus 40 miles home again !

This improvement continued the following year with results such as 1st at Loughrigg, 2nd at Boulsworth, 3rd at both Ben Nevis and Burnsall, and 5th at Wasdale and Langdale. These performances show Rob to have become a proficient runner over all types of terrain and distance, though the longer races remain his favourite, and in 1998 his dedication was rewarded with a 6th position in the British championship and 3rd in the English. He also represented his country in the Knockdhu International race that year, finishing 7th, and notched up victories in the Tour of Pendle and Withins Skyline, a 2nd in the Langdale Horseshoe, and 3rd at both Buckden Pike and Ben Nevis.

British Champion

1999 kicked off with a victory in Allan Greenwood's Ovenden Moor race and he also achieved success in the Tour of Pendle again and at both Ilkley Moor and Elidir Fawr, as well as being outright winner of the Wharfedale TTT (three events over three days). He further improved his Ben Nevis performance by placing 2nd, a position also gained in the British championship races at Callow, Donard-Commedagh and the Welsh 1,000m Peaks, and he was also runner-up in the British championship and 3rd in the English.

The Millenium Year came as something of an anti-climax, however, for he slipped back to 6th in the British and 4th in the English, though he did fulfill one long-held ambition by winning his Father's Buckden Pike race, while later in the year he completed his hat-trick of victories in the Tour of Pendle. Other noteworthy performances included 2nd at Dunnerdale, 3rd in the Ben Nevis, Clachnaben and Fairfield, and 5th in the Three Peaks, Ennerdale and the gruelling Mount Kinabalu race in Borneo, which usually involves a 7,500' climb over 5 ½ miles to the 13,500' summit (with the same amount of descent afterwards), though on this occasion the course was shortened due to torrential rain. (Rob's best position over the full course was 7th in 1999.) "I believe I slipped back in the championships that year," recalls Rob, "as progressing from being a not-very-good runner to gaining selection for England meant that I couldn't say 'No' to any invitations to races abroad. It was all new to me, so I raced too much and tired myself out. I don't regret it as I went to some great races and it was good experience for me."

During the Foot and Mouth year of 2002, his racing season was severely curtailed like everyone else's but he and Sharon did manage to achieve three double victories in the Glen Rosa Horseshoe, Up And Down The Old Man (of Coniston) and the Grasmere Guides Race, the latter event being held the day after completing their move from Yorkshire to Burneside in Cumbria.

Rob and Ian Holmes were joint runners-up in the 2002 British championship, while Rob came 3rd once more in the English and triumphed in such races as Carnethy, Arnison Crag, Grisedale Grind, Middlefell and Y Garn. Last year, he realised another ambition by winning the British championship outright and finishing a close 2nd to Ian Holmes in the English. In the British, he won Slieve Bearnagh, placed 2nd at Stuc A Chroin and Moel Eilio, 4th in the Brecon Beacons, 7th at Skiddaw and 9th at Penyghent. The latter two performances seem to suggest that his prowess on steep, rough courses is not matched by his speed over faster, easier terrain - a shortcoming shared by most previous fell champions. Penyghent and Skiddaw also featured in the English championship, while of the other four races, Rob won at Holme Moss, finished 3rd in both the Anniversary Waltz and Langdaie Horseshoe, and 4th at Lad's Leap. Had he won at Langdale, the final race of the series, or finished three places in front of Ian Holmes, he would have achieved a double championship win, but although he held a narrow lead at Blisco summit, the superior descending skills of Gavin Bland and Holmes put paid to his hopes of accomplishing this feat. He did fulfill one other ambition last year, however, by winning the Ben Nevis Race, with success also coming in the Wadsworth Trog (with a new record of 2.50.03), Ingieborough, Coledale Horseshoe and what is now his local event (having since moved from Burneside to Staveley), the Kentmere Horseshoe. Rob also won the Lakeland Classics (Long A's) championship last year and gained a praiseworthy 2nd placing on Jura. He has so far represented England twice in the European championships, finishing 28th in both 1999 and 2000, while in the 2002 World Trophy event he was placed 48th, perhaps accentuating the difference between rough British courses and the smoother terrain so beloved of Continental athletes. He has also competed in the Matterhorn Lauf and the Sierre-Zinal, his best position being 6th in the latter.

Determination

As previously mentioned, Rob's earliest guide and inspiration was his father Pete but as a teenager he came to respect other clubmates who were doing well at that time, namely Ian Ferguson, Bob Whitfield and Andy Peace, while nowadays he has great admiration for triple British and five times English champion, Ian Holmes, from whom he receives occasional advice on training and racing. "I also got some help from Dennis Quinlan when I was aged 20," Rob recalls, "but it was more in the nature of casual advice rather than formal coaching."

Dennis is, of course, the noted coach who has himself competed as an International on road, track and cross-country, besides running many fell races, and who co-authored with Norman Matthews the BAF coaching guide, *Fell And Hill Running* (1996). "As a young boy, Rob was little better than average," says Dennis, "but as the years went by, he became more and more determined to improve. I recognised that he was not a naturally fast runner but an endurance athlete and so I encouraged him to increase the volume of his training to provide a large endurance base. His biking enthusiasm enhanced that approach, for it is more possible to do a large volume of training mixing running and biking than it is with running alone. Biking is particularly beneficial for fell running because of the climbing strength gained from it. Rob's recent successes have stemmed from his very consistent determination year after year."

When living in Yorkshire, Rob's performances began to improve on a steady diet of running 60/70mpw, including races, plus seven hours of cycling. He would run 4 miles in the morning before work and 8/10 miles in the evening, while Tuesdays and Thursdays would be club training nights, with speed work in the winter supervised by Dennis Quinlan. For fell training, he would use Baildon or Ilkley Moors. Since moving to Cumbria, Rob cycles to and from work and then runs his 8/10 miles in the evening. Now virtually surrounded by fells, he trains on Potter Fell and the higher Kentmere tops, with his long runs also starting from home or else used to retrace the course of a forthcoming race. Neighbouring villagers at Staveley include Pete and Anne Bland and also Dave Meek (Helm Hill Runners and SARDA) who inaugurated the Langdale Horseshoe race back in 1973 when he was running for Keswick AC.

Comparatively few fell runners excel equally on climbs and descents and, in common with such celebrated champions of the past as Harry Walker (1973) and Mike Short (1975 and '78), Rob's strongest asset is definitely his climbing ability, though Dennis Quinlan has advised him that very short speed work to get more leg speed would help his descending. He doesn't mind what type of terrain a race entails but his preference is for grassy courses like the Fairfield and Kentmere Horseshoes.

Outside fell running, Rob has also made a name for himself in cyclo-cross racing: "I started doing a bit when I was 15 and rode in the Three Peaks cyclo-cross when I was 17, lying about my age. I've won the Peaks for the last three years and also compete over parkland courses (similar to club runners' cross-country), finishing 7th in the National championships in January this year."

During the Foot and Mouth year of 2001, Rob began road racing on his bike as well with the Ronhill Cycling Team. (Ronhill also provides some sponsorship for his fell running, as does Pete Bland Sports.) "I'd had no experience," recalls Rob, "but with a solid grounding in cyclo-cross, was sure I'd be okay. After my first few races, I found that I was really enjoying it and was soon taking part in premier-7 calendar races. I was getting placed in the Top 20 in these events and impressed the manager of the Scottish team, Vello Eccosse, who invited me to ride for them in the Tour of Ireland. I rode well but crashed on the 3rd stage and dislocated my shoulder, causing me to retire. Shortly afterwards, I won my first race, the South Western Divisional Championships, and this rates highly on my list of personal achievements.

Improving The Sport

Rob has been lucky with injuries so far: "My only real lay-offs from fell running have been six weeks with glandular fever and a week in hospital following a downhill skiing accident." His aims for the future are: "To win the British championship again, to win the Three Peaks fell race and improve my Ben Nevis time, to keep on winning races in general and to stay injury-free."

He also has some thoughts on improving the sport: "I would like to see the championship races being organised by the FRA rather than the clubs as under the present system some of the events chosen are just a rip-off. I think we should be able to enter all six races at the beginning of the year, with payment going to the FRA and the prizes all being equal for each race. The FRA could afterwards make a donation to each club for promoting the races.

I would like to see the World Trophy come to Britain and be able to compete in it over a real fell course. Likewise, I would like to see an end to the bickering over the selection for teams to contest the World and European championships: you run the Trial and that's it. And finally, I think more young runners should be doing the long Lakeland races like Ennerdale and Wasdale. They seem to be scared of them and for this I blame the coaches."

Descent Specialist

Sharon Taylor was born at Bradford on 10.8.79 and is employed as a Medical Rep, selling drugs to doctors. She played hockey and netball at school, representing Bradford in the latter sport, and also began her athletic career as a schoolgirl, winning the Bradford Schools U/14 cross-country championship and the U/16 3,000m championship. She joined Bingley Harriers in 1991 and ran her first fell race four years later when Dennis Quinlan took her to the amateur Hebden Moor event in Wharfedale, organised by another Bingley Harrier, Chris Wilkinson. She was then 15 years old and should have entered the U/16s race but going by cross-country age groupings, competed instead with the U/18s, the fastest of whom was Victoria Wilkinson, Chris' daughter, with Sharon finishing 5th. "Training with the Harriers as a junior consisted of a 40-minute run on Tuesday evenings," she recalls, "and speed work on Thursdays, generally followed by a race at the weekend. In between these sessions, I continued to play hockey and netball."

As an U/20 fell runner, Sharon began to achieve victories in her age group in such events as the Harriers v Cyclists, entering as a harrier and finishing 4th lady overall, and the Whinberry Naze Dash, both in 1998. It was during August of this year that she gained her first outright victory: "It was the Langdale Country Fair race and I turned in 5th position at the top, on Harrison Stickle, and came down well to cross the line first." This victory emphasised Sharon's outstanding talent as a fell runner for she truly excels on steep descents. Other results that year included 3rd at both Hebden Moor and Burnsall, 5th at Penyghent, and 6th at The Stoop and Dodd Fell, all in her native Yorkshire. She was 2nd Intermediate in her County fell championships the following year and 1st U20 at Buckden Pike (3rd overall) and Skiddaw (4th overall). Other good results included 3rd at Settle Hills and Dodd Fell, 4th at Dunnerdale and 5th at Langdale Horseshoe.

Long Distance Victory

The Millenium Year opened with Sharon winning the Ovenden Moors race from Ogden Water, near Halifax, and she later improved on both her previous Buckden Pike and Skiddaw performances by placing 2nd in each. She also achieved highly-creditable 3rd placings at Black Combe, Ben Nevis and in the Tour of Pendle, and finished 12th lady on her Three Peaks debut. Prior to the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in 2001, Sharon had finished 5th in the Ogden Moors race and had then scored a fine victory in the 20-mile Wadsworth Trog over neighbouring moors a week later. Her other three triumphs that year, Grasmere, Glen Rosa and Up And Down The Old Man (of Coniston), have already been mentioned in relation to Rob's victories in the same events and she also came 5th in the Ben Nevis Race.

Now resident in Lakeland, both Sharon and Rob were now able to contest a wider range of Cumbrian events, not to mention also having ideal training terrain right on their doorstep, and in 2002 Sharon emerged victorious at Black Combe, the Anniversary Waltz, Kentmere, Dalehead and Wansfell, with 2nd placings at Arnison Crag and Middlefell, 3rd at Causey Pike and 4th at the Duddon. Elsewhere, she finished 2nd in the Withins Skyline and Auld Lang Syne and 3rd at both Ben Nevis and Burnsall, while in the championships she gained a very worthy 4th position in the British and 5th in the English.

Ben Nevis Favourite

2003 was not quite such a successful season, however, with Sharon finishing one position lower in both the British and English championships and her only wins coming in two of the Woodheads' Haworth Moor races, the Stanbury Splash and Auld Lang Syne, and in Black Combe Runners' Kirkby Moor race over the fells of southern Furness. "The competition was better in 2003," she says, modestly low-rating her successes of the previous year. She did accomplish some good 2nd placings, however, including Boulsworth, Noon Stone, Sail Beck and Latrigg, with other noteworthy performances including 3rd in the Coledale Horseshoe, Langdale Horseshoe and Snowdon, the latter as a member of the victorious English ladies' team. She won the ladies' Mountain Bike Dash at Grasmere Sports and was 4th lady in the Guides Race, a position she also gained in the Ben Nevis, Three Shires and Anniversary Waltz. Sharon has now run five Ben Nevis Races, her fastest time being 1.5 8.32 last year, and this remains one of her favourite events, not only for the race itself but for the whole enjoyable weekend of socializing.

Other favourites are the Lakeland races, Kentmere, Fairfield and the quaintly-named Anniversary Waltz, along with Dave and Eileen Woodhead's races on Haworth Moor and Harden Moor (the Bunny Runs). Reporting her Auld Lang Syne victory in the last issue of "The Fellrunner", Dave wrote: "Now 24, Sharon first ran here as an 18-year-old, finishing 5th lady, and has progressed every year to finally being Queen of Haworth Moor." She became the Cover Girl of the February, 2003 Fellrunner when David Brett superbly captured on camera the climax of her fall in the Auld Lang Syne race two months previously as she sprawled on all fours in a peat bog, her mud-spattered face creased in a rueful smile..

Training

While studying at Sheffield University, Sharon ran every day for half-an-hour to an hour, mainly using the city's parks, while at weekends she would travel to the nearby Peak District for her long Sunday run. Since moving to the Lake District, first to Burneside and now at the neighbouring village of Staveley, she has trained locally on Potter Fell, again for between 30 and 60 minutes, but for the last six months has also been doing speed work at Kendal on Tuesday evenings, while more recently she has twice a week been doing an half-hour run in the morning before work. For a long Sunday run, she will generally use the higher Kentmere fells or, like Rob, go to recce the course of a forthcoming race, usually with her friend and rival, Lou Sharp, who lives in Kendal: "I get some helpful advice off Lou in regard to racing and

training." Since December last year, Sharon has averaged 40/50rnpw, including races. Other champion runners she admires and whose achievements she finds inspirational are Carol Greenwood, Sarah Rowell and Angela Mudge. "Sharon has always been a talented girl," says Dennis Quinlan. "She has been running quite well for many years now and I've always known that she had the potential to do better. She is now fulfilling more of that potential than she has done in the past. Her relationship with Rob has been of mutual benefit in supporting each other. Sharon saw what Rob had done and picked up from that."

As a teenager, she experienced some problems with pulled muscles, while as a senior she has been prone to ankle injuries and turned an ankle on three occasions in 2002, not all of them on descents: "I've been trying to strengthen my ankles with exercises and it must be paying off because I only once twisted an ankle last year."

Sharon feels that fell racing is "better-packaged and better-organised than track or cross-country and has a better atmosphere, but as a teenaged novice I didn't get any encouragement from anyone. I'm also concerned about the big increases in race distances when you move up into the seniors. My longest event as an U/20 was the Settle Hills Race (A: 7m: 1150') and it's a big jump from that up to the likes of the Three Peaks, which is what I had to do moving from an U/20 in 1999 to a senior in 2000. I managed to prepare myself for the 2000 Three Peaks by doing Sedbergh and Langdale in 1999."

Her ambitions for the immediate future are "to make the first three in both the British and English championships, to improve my Ben Nevis time and to do more new races. I'd particularly like to do the longer Lakeland events like Ennerdale, Wasdale and Borrowdale and to contest the Lakeland "Long A's" championship. I'd also like to race more abroad, having already done the SierreZinal twice, with my fastest time being 3 hrs 51 mins, and I also ran for Bingley in the open Grand Prix race at Grabs when Rob was representing England."

So far this year, she has won the Ogden Moors (a double victory with Rob), Middlefell and the Anniversary Waltz, and placed 2nd to Lou Sharp in the English championship races at Noon Stone and the Three Peaks, with a 3rd in the first British event at Donard-Commedagh.

In conclusion, we wish Rob and Sharon all the best for continuing success on the fells.