

Coniston Fell Race Weekend 2014 ... and the Krypton Challenges

I've lost track of the number of times I've done the Coniston Fell Race. It used to be an annual must-do for lots of Toddies a few years back when we camped at the social centre and Sam, the race organiser, laid on a Saturday evening ceilidh at Coniston village hall or the social club. I do remember that we used to have some great post-race parties. Well, the tradition appears to have been resurrected with this year's race weekend.

Over 60 Toddies and friends camped in vans and tents on the National Trust group field near Torver (thanks to Duncan Ritchie for pulling this together). A top spot right next to the lake and perfect for kids and adults to run wild. Over 30 Toddies were amongst the 400+ runners competing in the race on Saturday, this year chosen as an English Championship counter. Lots more Toddies were up on the hill shouting encouragement. The conditions were near perfect; overcast but reasonably warm with little wind. It's only 14km but, typical of many of the "shorter" Lakes races, it's a real test of character. You dash up the track from the start and before your legs know what's hit them you climb, hands on knees, straight up Mouldry Bank. A short runnable section is followed by the tough ascending traverse to the summit of Wetherlam. Grassy lines through the rocks, for those in the know, can then be descended to reach the rock ridge of Prison Band which takes you steeply to the summit of Swirl How. Full on racing from here on the long traverse of Brim Fell to the summit of the Old Man of Coniston. This is where prior knowledge helps you navigate the wickedly steep descent through the slate quarries, mainly on grass if you get the right line, until, rejoining the main tourist path, it's full pelt for the last 2km to the finish. With lots of great Toddie performances on the day we gave a good account of ourselves.



Post-race festivities for those staying on involved copious glasses of the locally brewed Coniston Bluebird bitter and other alcoholic beverages. The evening's entertainment was provided by Russ Blackhurst (guitar and vocals), Geoff Read (mandolin), Oscar Reid and Jake Blackhurst (percussion), Sue, Jane, Kath and Lucy B (dancing girls), everybody (singing along). A large circle of us sat round a blazing firebowl and contributed enthusiastic, if not particularly tuneful, backing to Russ and Geoff's marvellous repertoire of pop and folk songs.

A light drizzle pervaded Sunday but did not deter the resurrection of the Kiddies Krypton Challenge and the main event of the weekend; the Krypton Quadrathlon Challenge for adults regressing back to childhood. 18 kids, aged from 6 to 14 competed enthusiastically in a triathlon of space hopping, running and welly throwing. Outnumbered by cheering and overtly competitive parents the kids gave their all. (I hope all that mud washes off!). Jamie Harris and Jake Blackhurst eventually emerged as Krypton Kids 2014 (6-8 and 9-14 age categories respectively).

The drizzle appeared to dampen the commitment of some of our “well-over-18” age group but nine of the boldest committed themselves to the fray. Some donned wetsuits for the frenetic lilo race through the waves and round a boat moored a long way out in the lake, others braved the cold water in nothing more than budgie smugglers. The various lilo styles included traditional air beds, a lobster, a crocodile...and a “love seat”? The paddling styles were even more diverse. Side on leg kicking looked particularly ineffective but proved a lot quicker than Paula’s unsuccessful attempts to actually get on top of her lilo. Poor Russ’s lilo deflated at the deep end (skulduggery was hinted at but not admitted... who pulled Russ’s plug out?). We soon warmed up after this refreshing dip as we ran our socks off in a 200m dash and then space hopped with varying degrees of ineptitude. Welly throwing, an event introduced for the first time, proved to be the big leveller. The safest place to stand was in the direction the wellies were meant to be thrown. Stu’s camper van came in for some hammer from wayward size 11’s and the welly somehow ended up five metres behind Mark when he gave it his best effort.



The proud recipient of the prestigious title of KryptonPerson 2014, and the handsome trophy whittled from toughened glass by master craftsman and organiser of the event (me), didn’t win a single event but, by perseverance and finishing in the top 4 in each challenge, he somehow sneaked it. There were loud cries of “fixed” at the announcement that the winner was...me! ☺ The trophy now has pride of place on my mantelpiece.

So, what a top weekend. The kids and “big kids” enjoyed themselves immensely. With other activities undertaken by some, including football, rounders, cycling, kayaking, lazing around...etc, there was something for everyone. It’s on again for next year’s early May Bank Holiday weekend...there’s going to be a ceilidh at the village hall on Saturday night and singing round the firebowl on Sunday night. The Coniston Fell Race is on Saturday May 4th and the Krypton Challenges on the Sunday. YOU could be KryptonPerson 2015, so put it in your, and your kids, diaries now...and don’t forget to bring your lilos ☺

Phil (aka KryptonPerson 2014)