

Welsh Open Fell Running Championships 2005 Pencampwriaethau Agored Rhedwyr Mynydd Cymru 2005

Race 1: Llanbedr to Blaenavon 16/4500/AL. 19th March 2005

It was one of those good-to-be-alive days in the Black Mountains, with a warm sun shining from a clear blue sky, the ground firm underfoot and a largish field for the 25th running of the Llanbedr to Blaenavon race, the original South Wales long fell race. Spectators with long memories and very limited outside interests would have recognised four starters from the 1980 race: the inaugural winner, Philip Dixon from Kendal (who is responsible for thinking up many of the longer and harder events in the local calendar), Gareth Buffett, the organiser with partner Kate of all 25 races, Robert West from MDC (wearing the Springbok shirt as in 1980), and yours truly Old Greybeard who you will note doesn't feature in the results as he was in the later stages of flu and thought better of the long haul up the Sugarloaf.

While the old codgers mooched around at the back comparing injuries and noting how although the Blorengge seems much steeper these days winters aren't as cold as 25 years ago (*Ah, ou sont les neiges d'antan?*, as they say in Varteg) when we had to kick steps in the snow up the infamous climb, the younger generation were off and sprinting at the front. The leader for most of the race, Martin Humphreys from Stroud, at least gave a nod to the past with his 1970's hairstyle flowing in the breeze, and he had opened up a gap of over a minute on Crispin Flower at the summit of Crug Mawr, which he extended to 5 minutes at the summit of the Sugarloaf. However, Crispin had him in sight on the long drag up the north face of the Blorengge that has caused so many spectacular bonks in the past and which was voted Nastiest Climb in South Wales in a recent poll of a totally unrepresentative group of MDC members, and by tippy-toeing silently but at high speed through the lock-up garages and burnt-out cars that typify Blaenavon's World Heritage Site Crispin managed to sneak past Martin literally in the last 20 yards, much to the latter's surprise.

Further back the legions of MDC runners were split by 'foreigners' from a wide range of clubs, which seems to indicate that the Welsh FRA's policy of opening its championship to all comers is already paying dividends. Jackie Lee of Eryri held off the challenge of team-mate Victoria Musgrove to be first lady: local lad Dimitri Vorres put his detailed knowledge of the back lanes of Blaenavon to good use to be first veteran, while Adrian Orringe put a recent dose of the lurgy behind him to be first superveteran and to get some points on the board for his new club Mynydd Du. The evergreen Dick Finch had an easy win in the superdupervets over John Collins from Swansea, although John was giving away a good few years to his younger rival.

Two of the '25-year' men made it to the finish: Phil Dixon was 22nd in 3.03.50 and Robert West was 36th in 3.39.10. I wonder how many of this year's entries will be involved in the 50th race in 2030? I think I'll be hovering over the top of the Blorengge in my anti-grav Zimmer watching the fun.

So to the pub and then to the excellent 25th anniversary dinner. Many thanks to Gareth and Kate for a grand day out – all this and the Grand Slam too!

Old Greybeard