

## **South Wales Winter Hill Series 2004-2005**

The twelfth season of the South Wales Winter Hill Series (or Winter League for short) has just been completed, so I thought a quick summary of all the fun and games would be in order.

The League consists of seven short and surprisingly steep races at various venues in the Brecon Beacons National Park and the Valleys, in which a runner's best five results score points. The scoring system is based on time, with runners' scores being dependent on their times in relation to the average time of the first five finishers. With me so far? Although the League is administered by me and John Sweeting, it is not an MDC production and normally features races organised by members of a few different clubs. The programme of races also varies from year to year. All distances and heights quoted are approximate.

### **Round 1: Fan Fawr: 2/1000. 9<sup>th</sup> October 2004**

Straight up and down from Storey Arms, with some potential for route choice on the descent which in mist has caused embarrassment for several experienced runners in the past. There were no mistakes for Andy Jones (representing MDC at this stage but later 'defecting' to Mynydd Du) as he made his intentions for the League clear with a storming win in 16.42, which brought him a League record points score of 108. The majority of the rest of the field finished in a big rush between 18 and 23 minutes, with Peter Ryder of Brycheiniog impressing on his Winter League debut in third place, seeing off dad Chas by almost four minutes. Don't know where he gets it from!

### **Round 2: Blorenge: 3/1600. 13<sup>th</sup> November 2004**

The steepest of the lot and the race that has caused two runners to be hospitalised in the past and which was voted 'nastiest climb in South Wales' by the MDC Tuesday night gang in 2003. The route goes straight up the north face and then takes a slightly more wimpish line down the first part of the descent (following yours truly's spectacular but painful triple somersault descent on the old 'direct' route in 1998) before the pitch-black plummet through the tunnel (mind your head!... oops – too late) under the canal to the finish.

It was that man Jones again, although latest MDC recruit Gareth Craft gave him a good chase to finish only 21 seconds adrift. Mark Palmer's 1997 record was always safe though, and it looks as though there's no-one on the local scene capable of challenging it at present. Ryder Junior again took third, a fine result on a more technical course than Fan Fawr. The facilities of Nevill Hall hospital were not required this year.

### **Round 3: Abergwynfi: 3 ½/1500. December 11<sup>th</sup> 2004**

'The armpit of the Valleys' © Steve Littlewood but then he did pioneer the 'Littlewood's Folly' descent into the wrong village a few years back. Anyway, once past the burnt out cars and assuming the local hooligans haven't pinched the flags again, the running on the open hill is good and fast on short grass, interrupted only by the seriously vicious 'Bunny' climb up the steep side of Mynydd Caerau, from where if the red mist lifts there are views as far as Penyfan one way and Lundy Island the other.

Now look here Andy, this is getting tedious. How about giving someone else a chance? Another 108-pointer from the league leader, finishing a huge 1.46 ahead of Stroud's Mike Duxbury. There was some close racing further down the field

though, with the judges being unable to separate Simon Blease and Neil Lewis in 13<sup>th</sup> and a major battle between Chas Ryder, Chris Thomas, John Darby and Martin Lucas for the glory that comes as second supervet. Steve Littlewood of Hereford was already making sure of retaining his supervets title by winning that category in all three races. I've made no mention of the ladies yet, as no pattern had emerged, with MDC's Alice Bedwell winning the first two but missing this one to allow Emma Seward a first win.

Race headquarters is in the Great Western Hotel, a seriously intimidating valleys pub. However, Mrs G used to teach the landlord more years ago than she cares to remember, and as usual their hospitality was in inverse proportion to the grimness of the immediate vicinity. The choccy Santas seemed popular as well.

#### **Round 4: The Darran: 3/1300. January 15th 2005**

An unrelenting road, track and hill ascent of Twmbarlwm from Risca, with an unrelenting etc descent the same way. Very quick and very painful on the long road finish and not a good way to start the new year if you've over-indulged.

With Andy Jones sitting this one out, Peter Ryder made good his early-season promise with his first win, taking the notable scalp of (perhaps a not fully-fit) Matt Collins. Mind, you don't easily see off the likes of Duxbury, Craft and MDC's Pat Wooddisse without having a bit of talent, and it will be interesting to watch how Peter's running develops. By this stage in the League you can put fairly firm bets on where everyone else will finish, with allowances for injuries and illness, so there were no big surprises. Brycheiniog's Chris Gildersleve, in his first race back after some chronic plantar fasciitis, pulled a hamstring on the descent so that was him out for the rest of the series, while Satu Haikala must have thought she had done enough to win the 'furthest travelled for a Winter League race' by coming all the way from Finland, but as we shall see Brycheiniog's secret weapon Hiro Nakayama beat her by several thousand miles in the PCC race. Also worth a mention is Alice Bedwell's third win in the Ladies category, but her absence from the last three races meant that her quest for glory was at an end.

#### **Round 5: Llanthony: 4/1400. February 12<sup>th</sup> 2005**

One of the most beautiful settings for any race anywhere, with the start and finish at Llanthony Priory in the Vale of Ewyas, but with a long climb to Offa's Dyke and an interminable ridge run before a finishing plummet. Good views though.

The leading group, including Andy Jones, Danny Lewis and Matthew Collins, went astray on the first climb and ended up way to the south of the first summit, allowing Mike Duxbury and Ifor Powell to take the lead along the ridge. A big effort by the errant three brought them back into contention but Ifor held them off on the long run in across the very muddy fields to win by 3 seconds in 39.31. Jessica Turnbull of Cheltenham had an impressive run in the poor conditions to be first lady in 45.34, beating her father Ian by over 12 minutes. In yet another parent/child race Judith Powell took just double son Ifor's 39 minutes to get round.

Although conditions at the start/finish were quite pleasant, snow storms could be seen along the ridge and, worse, they were heading north-south whereas the race goes south-north. If the leading group hadn't gone astray on the first climb they might have missed the worst of the weather, but as they all lost about five minutes through their error they had to face the blizzard with the rest of us. Really it was very cold on the ridge and all the runners were glad to get into the lee of Loxidge Tump on the descent. John Sweeting, the marshal at the turn, was not envied.

Helen Bennett turned an ankle badly at the top of the descent and she was fortunate that the MDC walking section (Kay, Fred and Clive) were handily placed with a supportive arm and extra clothes. Perhaps in these conditions the organiser should insist on full body cover rather than just recommend it?

The biggest round of applause went to John Battersby, now into HyperVet (o/70) racing, who was awarded a rare and coveted sweatshirt for completing 50 Winter League races.

### **Round 6: Sugarloaf: 4 ½/1500. March 5<sup>th</sup> 2005**

New for 2005, this takes a longish route to the top from the Crown Inn, Pantygelli. I had to miss this one with the lurgy so I can't say much more except it was \*\*\*@!\* cold waiting for them all to finish. Although the course was well marked and flagged, with marshals on the top and at the critical junctions, Danny Lewis and Matt Collins again thought the course wasn't long enough and decided to add an extra loop off the wrong side of the mountain. In the absence of Andy Jones this left the race open for others to record some high scores, with Mike Duxbury triumphing in 42.25 and Dave Burton (Tarren Hendre) second in 45.00. Matthew Stott ran an impressive 45.14 to be third overall and first junior, and in a season where children beating fathers was becoming the norm he saw off his father Andy by almost 7 minutes. Andy Jones's absence took him off the top of the leader board and meant that the overall champion would not be decided until the final race of the season. Exciting, eh?

### **Round 7: Pen Cerrig Calch: 4/1800. April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2005**

The traditional finale, with the highest summit of the season (2301 feet). A very long climb with a nice boulder field at the top, round the trig and back the same way and hope you're not involved in a sprint finish down the last field.

On a balmy spring day, when really the checkpoint marshals should have been charged for the pleasure of going up the hill, Andy Jones returned after missing Sugarloaf and was never headed as he made sure of the League title. The real excitement was in the Veterans, where Simon 'Wheeze' Blease had to beat Mark Bryant to make sure of the prize. Wheeze's recent form had been very impressive though, and with Mark coming back from the flu and suffering an overindulgence in business trips to Europe it never came down to the finishing sprint the spectators wanted. South Wales's oldest 'independent' fell club, Brycheiniog, were well represented for a change, but whether Hiro Nakayama has Welsh ancestry remains unproved. He did pick up the 'furthest travelled for a league race' trophy though, as a quick check of Fred's 1947 AA Book of the Road showed Osaka is even further away from Llanbedr than Beddgelert.

A quick session with Mrs Greybeard's new computer gave us the final League tables, and with the sun beating down on the field the crystal glassware and commemorative Walter Winterleague mugs were awarded. 94 runners ran at least one race, but only four did all seven this year. The full results are on the attached table but in line with our motto of participation being more important than results I won't bore you here with who-won-what.

On behalf of the League, thanks to all the race organisers for their very generous donations to the prize fund, to all the marshals for their efforts in checking we all stayed alive and to the various hostelries who seemed only too pleased to have 50 people in their bars on a Saturday afternoon. As is standard practice, there will be changes to the programme of races for next season and we hope some new

venues may emerge. Meanwhile, have a good summer and we'll see you at Fan Fawr for Winter League 2005-2006 on 8<sup>th</sup> October.

Martin Lucas