

The cloud ceiling was around 800 metres at the moment. The next checkpoint was on a peak of 942 metres. That meant running into the mist. And what a mist it was! That checkpoint was no problem either, but on the way to the next peak I messed up the navigation profoundly. My sense of direction got totally out of order. After a while I didn't even trust the compass bearing anymore. Every direction seemed to go the wrong way. It was like being in some sort of Bermuda Triangle.

Lost in the mist on a mountain in a strange country. I felt very lonely. Suddenly I heard voices from other runners. The voices came closer but because of the thick cloud we were in I didn't see them until they were 25 metres from me. I was lucky. It was a team that had what it took to find the way to the peak of Carnedd Llewelyn. They had been on the mountain before and when their altimeter read 1064 metres and we could not get any higher it was obvious that we were at the right place.

From there we went down to a valley with an altitude 750 metres below the peak we started the descent from and then up again towards the next mountain. For some reason I did not want to follow the other runners who knew the area, so I ran towards the mountain Tryfan on a route I chose by myself.

According to the map a trail ran from a lake up to the top. I found it at the foot of the mountain but it soon disappeared into boulders and crags. The mountainside became more and more steep the higher I got and by using my hands I climbed up into the cloud again. Since the visibility was very limited, it was impossible to see where the best possibilities to get up were to be found. Suddenly I had climbed to a point where I was stuck on the steep cliff. The hands had a grip in cracks and one foot rested on a ledge, but a climber with my limited skill could not get any higher—the cliff was just too smooth. 30 metres below me the mountainside disappeared in the mist and maybe it was luck that I could not see how scared I had reason to be.

Very carefully I went down until I could traverse the cliff and find a new way up. I got stuck on that one too but finally I managed to reach the top of Tryfan. There I met some of the other runners who said something about it having been "quite a scramble" to get up. The word "scramble" was new to me so I asked what it meant. They answered that it is when one is climbing by using the hands. Since I had never done that in any race I had been in before, that word had not been in my English vocabulary, but "scramble" was going to be the proper verb to describe what I was doing a few more times in this race.

There was more scramble already on the next mountain. It was not just any little hill, but Snowdon, the tallest mountain in Wales. From the direction that we came there were, according to the map, two different trails—Pyg Track and Miner's Track—that would take us to the checkpoint. Both were supposed to go all the way to the top but this time, like so many other times in the stages to come, I was to find that trails on maps are like a lottery. I chose Miner's Track—the wrong one! Suddenly it disappeared into rocks near an old copper mine. To scramble the 480 metres to the top took 40 minutes. The mist

destroyed any possibility of seeing the least difficult way up and avoiding all the crags. When I was hanging in heather and ledges and losing time because I was stuck I was almost grateful that I was not part of the competition. That thought saved me a great deal of frustration.

The wet gale force wind on the top of Snowdon drained the body of the heat generated by the climb and I started to freeze. Now it was only a matter of guessing on the right trail down the southern side of the mountain and running about 6 kms to the finish.

I arrived at the camp site where we were going to live tonight, more than one and a half hours behind the team that won the stage. The British Parachute Regiment was co-organiser of the event, responsible for logistics and mountain rescue and they provided warm showers, comfortable lodging under canvas and food of gourmet standard.

DAY TWO. September 22nd. Llyndy Is af Farm to Cymmer Abbey 59kms

One method to find a mountain top among the clouds is to run a compass bearing as close as possible, and then walk uphill until one can't get any higher. That's how I got to the first real mountain checkpoint on today's stage, Moelwyn Mawr, 770 metres. Also the neighbouring peak, Moelwyn Bach was found without problem. But then we were on a stretch of a few kms going down to sea level again. The map was tucked inside the shirt and the compass was put in a pocket on the rucksack to make the hands free, and then it was just a matter of slipping and bouncing down the steep mountainside in as controlled a way as possible. Sometimes it was very difficult to stop sliding since the short wet grass provided very little friction. I thought I got some idea of how the ski jumpers can experience their sport. I tore the seat of my pants but that was a cheap price to pay for such a descent.

The two most difficult mountains came towards the end of today's stage. Rinhig Fawr and Rinhog Fach looked really brutal on the map-crag everywhere. I had by now learned that if one had not been in the area before, the only methods to find the way is to follow somebody who checked out the course during his vacation, or to navigate very carefully in the mist. There are a few trails. Some of them are on the map but quite often they do not correspond with reality. Since I took on the Rinhogs on my own I had to walk through heather, over boulders, and scramble crags on a compass bearing that was not to be deviated from. It did, of course, consume lots of time. The worst thing was knowing that trails, not marked on the map, went all the way up, ready to be used by the runners who knew them. This made me perceive the entire event as a parody on fair competition. However running on my own I wasn't even fair enough to take part so instead I was aiming for a good adventure. And a fun adventure it was!

On a stretch of approximately five kms, it was not possible to take one decent running stride. Crags, heather, boulders, scrambling, and more crags limited the tempo significantly. When I finally had the Rinhog mountains behind me, my body was weak from hunger. All the

food that I had been carrying from the start was unfortunately already consumed, and the muscles were almost trembling since they did not get any fuel. At the last checkpoint I was given a candy bar by a man who had walked up the mountain to serve two other runners. Strength returned to my legs and I came to the finish feeling rather comfortable but just like yesterday I was one and a half hours behind the best team.

In the tent camp at Cymmer Abbey, I sat for three hours and ate serving after serving of the delicious food. It was a total calory spree after every stage but the body requires a lot of energy in this terrain.

The real strugglers had to use torches to find their way during the last hours on the mountain and came in wet and dirty straight from the finish and in to the food tent. After some servings they went on to get their aches and pains taken care of. It was like that every evening. They had long days but they didn't give up. I admired them a lot.

DAY THREE. September 23rd Cymmer Abbey to Eistedda Gurig Farm 63kms

In the lead after two stages was strangely enough a mixed team consisting of Helen Diamantides and Martin Stone. A woman in the lead of this macho race! The phenomenon required a closer study so I decided to follow Helen and Martin for a while. As long as we ran the roads in the beginning I found the pace very comfortable. But then we were going up to the top of Cader Idris almost 900 metres higher than the point we started from. There Helen Diamantides was in her right element. To run up the steep hill was not sensible tactics but she strided so briskly that I had to give my very best just to not be left behind. When we had been to the checkpoint and went down the south west side of the mountain I didn't have a chance to follow.

I caught up with them again in the valley, and we stayed together for some hours, until a steep downhill made me lose contact again. The rest of this stage was quite undramatic for me. The only problem I encountered was when the plastic cover to the map ripped but that was repaired with bandaids I was carrying. Today I was only 30 minutes behind Helen and Martin who took their second stage win.

It was only the first mountain that was enveloped by cloud today, so I could finally see what the landscape looked like. Yes, the mountains were very scenic, just like I had pictured them on two previous stages.

DAY FOUR . September 24th Eistedda Gurig Farm to Gallt-Y-Bere Farm

This night we slept in a barn. The sheep were on the mountains so we had the facility for ourselves. I ate fried potatoes, beans and eggs for breakfast. I ate until I wanted to throw up. The calories were going to be precious later on today.

The start was at 07.00 hours and today's stage offered us quite a bit of road running. I took off with the leaders and decided to stay with

them. The other runners had private support crews with cars that waited where we crossed the road. If the road was to be followed for some kms they changed to road running shoes. The cars followed and served food and drinks. Where we left the asphalt and turned out on the mountain again the cars were parked and special fell running shoes were again brought out and laced on.

Without shoes with long nobs under the sole one was handicapped on the downhill. The grip in regular shoes was just not sufficient so that one could descend the mountains fast enough. I had road shoes, but cut tread under the sole, in order to improve the traction.

After approximately 50 of today's 67 kms I had broken away from the pack with another runner, Rob Collister, who also was on his own since the partner he started out with had dropped out. On the way to Drygarn Fawr we decided to catch a trail that was supposed to take us across the plateau to the checkpoint. Stupid that we had not learned that the trails on maps are often difficult to find on terrains. We lost many minutes in the high grass and tufts when the one's we previously ran away from overtook the lead.

DAY FIVE. September 25th Galt-Y-Bere Farm to Carreg Cennen Castle

Wake up call was at 05.30 hours as usual. Today on the last stage we had a staggered start. Adrian Belton and Mark McDermott, last years winners of the classic Karrimor orienteering in Scotland, took of first with a six minute lead over Helen Diamantides and Martin Stone. Rob Collister, John Redmayne (winner of yesterday's stage), and I left after everybody else, since we were for different reasons running on our own outside of the competition.

Already after some hours of running I started to suspect that something was wrong with my body today. I didn't sweat at all. Everything I drank went straight through me and I had to stop to urinate every ten minutes or so. The symptoms are well familiar to me. It has happened before when I have been hiking mountains for some weeks and in really long races. I think it is caused by the body sweating out all it's potassium and thereby impairing the ability to absorb the water that comes down in the stomach. During the previous four stages I had been drinking many litres of clear, but mineral free, water from the mountain streams. My own fault that I did not prevent this disorder when I have a history of it.

Without sweating, the body can't regulate it's temperature and that significantly affects the ability to perform. During the last 30 kms up in the Black Mountains, I felt really sick and didn't have the strength to run through any kind of terrain. The shirt was completely dry, even between the back and the rucksack. If a creek crossed my way, I stopped to drink but to no use. The stops to let the water out came every 200 metres.

Well I wanted an adventure, and for somebody in this condition it was just an adventure to try to make it to the finish. Sometimes I did seriously consider spending the night in the sleeping bag out on the mountain and walk to the finish the next morning, hopefully somewhat

recovered. That seemed a better alternative than dropping out of the race, or pushing a body that was in chemical imbalance.

Bananas contain a lot of potassium. A captain from the Parachute Regiment gave me two, when I came from the checkpoint. He also gave me a litre of sports drink with the electrolytes I was depleted of. This action was typical of the military's effort as co-organisers of the race. They never held back on the service and nothing seemed impossible for them.

The mineral boost made me feel somewhat less sick and finally I reached the finish at the old castle. I didn't get any place and my time was irrelevant. The Dragon's Back Race did however give me something I value very highly - many interesting experiences. They were worth running many miles for.

The victory went to Martin Stone and Helen Diamantides. On the last stage they pulled away from Belton and McDermott by 30 minutes. After studying the phenomenon, Helen Diamantides, on the third stage her victory was nothing that surprised me. The way she co-ordinated her amazing strength, will-power, running technique, and thorough preparations was of the kind that makes a Champion. Like most fell runners she trains by walking uphill and running down. Races of more conventional standard such as the marathon do not really interest her.

I thought some woman would catch up with the best men in a race sometime in the future. But the future is apparently here. We had better increase our training guys!.

Rune Larsson.

Editors note.

There was a charitable aspect to the Conoco Jet Dragon's Back Race and funds were raised for the Amanda Bevan Trust- a charity operating a brain injuries rehabilitation centre in Coventry.

Ian Waddell has introduced a new concept to British ultradistance running and the success of the event makes it more than likely that we shall see another race in 1994. The television coverage was spectacular and footage has been shown in over sixty countries.

The nature of the event makes it necessary to restrict entries to teams and many of the matters raised in Rune Larsson's excellent article will be considered. There is a valid point that anyone checking out the course thoroughly beforehand has some advantage. Having said that one might say that whilst it is hard for foreign entries anyone was at liberty to check out the course. It might also be said that in any race over the same route anyone having run it before has an advantage over someone running it for the first time. As Mark Twain said "Anyone that's had a bull by the tail knows a few more things than someone that hasn't". In 1994 the same might be said of those runners that have had a Dragon by the tail.