

THE FELL RACE

Founded... 1996.

The report (below, left) followed the first running of the race.
Its writer followed lots of faster runners.

Course ascents and descents were gauged using OS 1:10000 maps,
which give 5 metre contours. Height gain was minimised.
Distances were measured using a wheel by a qualified course measurer.
It has been run every midsummer since then -
and there was wild talk of it being run on the morning of January 1, 2000.

But not by me.

Orion Harriers Midsummer Fell Race. 21st June, 1996

It seems every time an idea like this surfaces, it surfaces in a pint of beer.

This one was McMullen's AK; a mild beer but the course isn't - it's tough; tough enough to be a Grade "A" Fell Race, which, as Paul Filler gleefully pointed out, "is quite unusual with views of central London and including the 'flat' county of Essex".

To elevate (no pun intended) the course to "Grade A" took its architects quite some time.

The first sprawling efforts meandered as far as The Owl at Lippits Hill but that meant insufficient height was gained per mile covered, thus losing the quality and intensity of elevation: we had to condense it, pack it into as compact an area as possible.

You can see from the accompanying route description that the final course centres on Pole Hill and Yardley Valley.

Pack runs for the weeks prior to the race veered towards that area, new loops were tested and discarded almost daily.

We gave up even trying to describe the "new" route there were so many variations.

However, the *final* new course does seem to have an elegance and natural flow to it.

A suggestion that would have made it slightly tougher was rejected on the purely aesthetic grounds (honest!)

that the view running *down* Yardley Meadow should somehow be retained.

Figures for ascent and descent were kept as ultra-conservative as possible to ensure that we really were going to make it to Grade "A".

The course is genuinely further to run up and run down than it reads.

Anyway, back to the 1996 race...

With weather like the Mediterranean and with 7 hills on the course like Rome, a lot of blood, sweat and tears were spilled... like the Coliseum.

The race starts and ends with a ferocious climb up Pole Hill to the Greenwich Meridian Obelisk from the west,

which didn't worry Peter Tarrier, John Wallis and Quin Broadbent who charged away at the off.

My sole regret at running in the race is not seeing Peter boil over midway through.

"I saw steam coming out of his ears going down Yardley Meadow.

I think that's where he blew up!", said a *friend*...

Peter still finished miles ahead, even Pole's and Yardley's ahead, of your reporter.

Meanwhile, back at the sharp end, Paul Filler had steadily worked his way through the field -

"I definitely think course knowledge helped." -

which maybe explains why the real route was kept secret till Race Night.

Your reporter agrees: at a last vital downhill, I let two runners ahead of me

run just that little bit too far, before yelling they were off course, as I cut the corner.

Yes! Play up and play the game!

Paul won in an impressive 21.47, (STILL the course record) with John Wallis maintaining his early effort for 2nd.

Neil Pitcher surprised a lot of folk with his excellent 3rd, and Tony Eccles (4th) was first Vet.

Tony and Kevin Cressy have been seen doing hill training sessions on Pole Hill, so maybe course knowledge did play its part.

Midsummer madness for the 42 finishers was rounded off by a PDQ OK BBQ back at HQ by P O'C: A1 even without AK.