Midsummer Fell Race: 21.06.98

or

"Even the best laid courses..."

In view of last year's fiasco when a flash flood shortly before the race obliterated the trail paper with the result that half the field went the wrong way, this year there were to be no mistakes...

(I sense excuses coming on! Ed.)

Accordingly, trail paper was laid out the Saturday evening before the race, just in case the trail layer overslept on Sunday. Hand shears were employed to trim inaccessible parts, especially the awkward section leading down to the bottom of Gilwell Lane - you know, the bit where people *usually* go wrong! Here, humidity, heavy rainfall and lack of sunlight had conspired to create near-jungle conditions, although you are more likely to be eaten alive by midges here than the cannibals rumoured to inhabit the nearby Yardley nether world.

To be on the safe side, I strolled round the course before the race on Sunday morning, topping up trail paper where needed. I was particularly concerned about the top of Pole Hill. I need not have worried. Someone had thoughtfully scattered pages torn out of a porno mag, providing a more than adequate - and scenic - path up to the Obelisk, around which lay a number of empty bottles and extra-long Rizla packets, suggesting that a high (sic) old time had certainly been had up there! Naturally, I felt obliged to pick up the assorted blonde lovelies and replace them with more mundane trail paper, this being a family club. I still have the mags.

So... where was I? Oh yes. What could possibly go wrong?

At the bottom of Yardley, the race looked to be going to plan. Michael Cates, despite having just come off night shift/flu/bad knee - or it may have been all three - led the race from Paul Filler who was being dogged by a cautious Andy Vince. It was at this juncture that Cates reportedly said to his pursuers, "I think I'll settle for third, now.", and duly eased off, which just goes to show the man's accuracy or arrogance (take your pick).

A biggish gap, then Steve Herington, one of a worrying number of competitors wearing those rather glamorous wrap-round sunglasses - could they see where they were going? Would they stay on course?

Another biggish gap, then Gerry, Roger, Steve Adams - everything hunky-dory, so far - Dave Stanley looking particularly fetching in his Ray-Bans, and so on all good predictable stuff until...

...SOMETHING UNEXPECTED HAPPENED! (Well... gasp! Ed)

Other runners, wholly unconnected with our race, started to appear, mixing indiscriminately with our Fell runners. Graham North was spotted, as was Steve Beckett. It was an Eton Manor training run - all those women! A steady flow of oestrogen trickling down hill.

Now, it's at this point our Fell race turns left, whereas the Manor elected to turn right. A hapless Dave Cracknell, as marshal, did a frantic job picking out those runners in the race from those that weren't, but new member Paul Almond had slipped through Dave's net and was last seen heading along the top of Yates' Meadow just as the race leaders were coming the other way from Gilwell Lane - "But that bloke with the beard said 'This way!'", Paul protested. Beckett again, I fancy. It was suggested to Paul, maybe he ought to stop right there, wait for the tail-enders and follow them home, but no. Paul insisted on doing the proper course, promptly turned round, trotted back over the meadow, vanished through a hedge gap at the end and I never saw him again.

Meanwhile, Dave Scaysbrook had emerged, leading a small pack of runners. He had clearly seen Almond go straight on instead of down the hill. Scaysbrook looked confused. Surely he could not go wrong, I mean, all that trail paper...?

Uh oh.

"Dave! Turn left!" I shrieked. Left, dammit!" or quite possibly some other imprecation, doubtless milder, this being a family club. "**#^ left!" I thus averted what would almost certainly have been another disaster peculiar to this particular race. (sic, again)

Meanwhile, back at the top of the hill... (Which one, now? You've lost me, too! Ed) ...the hill taking the runners from Yardley towards Gilwell... (Nope, sorry. Still lost. Ed.) ...a marshal had been stationed to divert the field left then down the tricky bit mentioned earlier. Now this particular member has a penchant for Cockney rhyming slang (although more often a language best known to him alone). His instructions were to tell the runners to "hang a right". However... oh dear... however, I fear this may have been variously transmuted into "Strike a light", "Take a Wilbur and Orville", "Do a Doris" or something even more obscure. Anyway, we know Yvonne Turner and John Mahon went straight on here, thereby going wildly off course. They seemed to enjoy the race, though who wouldn't, doing a shorter course and ending up in the top ten?

As to how Paul Almond made his way home, I don't think I'll ever know.

1	P Filler		23.05
2	A Vince		23.27
3	M Cates		24.22
4	S Herington		24.40
5	Y Turner	L	26.04*
6	R Warner		26.43
7	S Adams		26.50
8	J Whiffin		26.56
9	D Scaysbrook		27.32
10	J Mahon		27.39*
11	P Cressy		27.43
12	G Sayer		27.46
13	M Rosbrook		27.58
14	J Waldrab		28.09
15	D Stanley		28.11
16	N Wright		28.52
17	J Cash		29.10
18	P Robinson		29.17
19	A Croucher		31.00
20	H Papachristos	L	31.12
21	M Gasper		31.37
22	N French	L	31.52*
23	R Valins		31.52*
24	T Gasper	L	32.06
25	W French		32.17
26	A Austin		32.38
27	A Cushway		33.00
28	P Almond		35.28*
DNF	G Shaw		

*Ooops - took wrong course.