

Optimism, Delusion and Brief Encounters with Greatness

2016's Peak Raid 3 Mini Mountain Marathon (MMM) series has just drawn to a close after another excellent quartet of races in the Peak District. In line with Tom Saville's Accelerate blog from the other day, I thought it may be of interest to share a few thoughts from a mid-ranking runner. Where Tom was aiming to collect all 500 points, I was never burdened with such expectation! I hope you enjoy my light-hearted observations of this year's series.

I've been fell running since about 2006 and am a member with Calder Valley. I was introduced to score events in about 2011, starting with some local ones with Calder Valley and Todmorden Harriers. I stumbled across the Peak Raids in 2014 by virtue of thumbing through the FRA fixture calendar and thinking let's give them a go. I did two in that first year (Edale & Crowden) and scored ok (315 & 360 respectively). Thoroughly impressed by the organisation and overall standard I was relishing 2015 and doing all four. However, my good lady wife saw fit to book us both on various trips/ weddings/away days etc and much to my chagrin, I missed all four – yes all four! I love my wife dearly, but I did have to stress to her that if this were to happen again in 2016, it would put a severe strain on our wedding vows! I'm happy to say our diary was left nice and clear and I could attend all four in 2017.

Filled with trepidation, I approached Round 1 at Edale slightly under the weather having been injured for a few weeks prior, so points wise, was looking for something starting with a 3. As someone who loves maps and can pore over them for *hours* on end, is a keen outdoorsman, has a Geography degree and a sound sense of direction, one would think these events would be relatively straightforward and drama free. Think again.

Round 1 – Edale

Edale proved to be the kindest of the four weather wise, with mild and fairly clear conditions greeting us as we arrived at Edale Village Hall; a marvellous little spot steeped in tradition as the start of the Pennine Way. The drive from Hebden Bridge over to Edale is about ninety minutes or so, so there is ample time for one to churn over in one's mind potential strategies, ponder the eternal clockwise/anticlockwise question, and generally work yourself up into a right old lather before you even begin. On arrival at race HQ, one of the first things I do once I've got all my gear on and checked my kit, is check Dave's race map (the one minus the check point (CP) locations but with the CP clues on) and look for any sheepfolds. Yes, the score event's best friend, the sheepfold! I can find those all-day long. Re-entrants, ditch bends, saddles and small knolls you can keep – give me sheepfolds any day! The pre-match nerves that hit you about ten minutes or so before the start of a score event are something I've not felt since my football days, and that necessary slug of adrenaline is something that I relish.

However, upon dibbing in, receiving the race map for the off, and wandering out of the door with the clock ticking, it is amazing how one's mind can descend into a state of mild panic.

I'm not sure if anybody else does what I call the score event 'Okey-Cokey?!' Upon receipt of the race map you go one way, then re think and then go the other. Backwards, forwards, this way and that. You get about ten yards down the road and go, "Hang on, no, this way's best..." Until your scrambled mind settles on one way and the chimp inside your head is silenced for a few moments. Edale was a case in point; do I head north toward Ringing Roger, or south toward Mam Tor? I finally settled on south toward Man Tor and a clock wise route, with like I say, the kind weather offering a relatively straightforward circular option, with Dave's big prizes of 60 & 70 points being located to the west. The Edale valley lends itself to a horseshoe type route and I was pleased to come in with a drama free 345 points, having not pushed myself too hard.

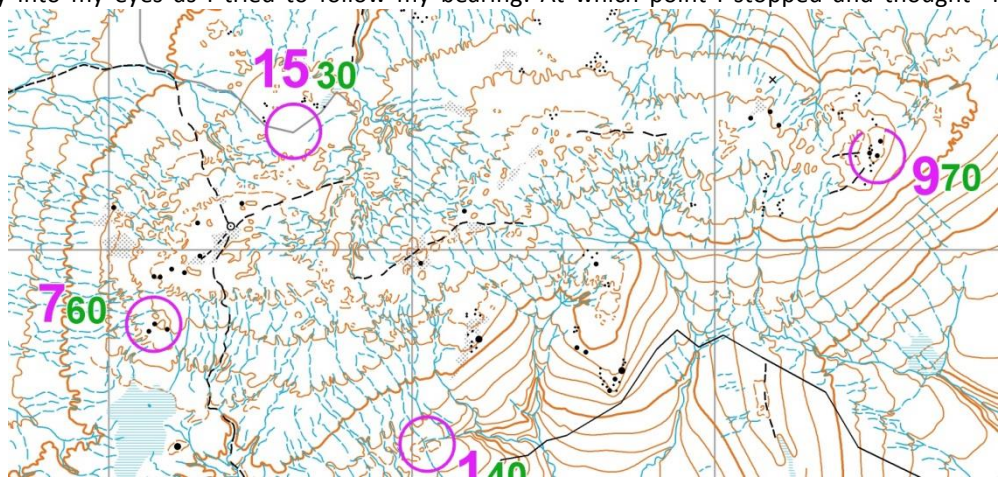


Round 2 - Old Glossop

Buoyed by my decent showing at Edale there was only two weekends to wait until the next one at Old Glossop, another first time for me, so I was chomping at the bit for this one. Again, the drive over was a combination of Claire Balding on the radio and me getting carried away that 400 + might be on the cards today if all goes right. Quite where I get this optimism from I'm not sure, it must be the energy drink and protein bar consumed on the way over. I'd had the good sense to check the weather forecast and it had given an outside chance of some sleet and rain, so I'd packed the thermal tights just in case and chose to wear them as a precaution.

I made my way to the slightly staggered start at about the same time as a strapping young lad dressed merely in shorts and a short sleeved base layer, with some Swedish writing and a Silva logo on it, plus one of those dinky thumb compasses that all the good score eventers seem to use. "He looks a bit useful", I thought to myself. As usual upon receipt of the race map, I did the usual okey-cokey, changed my mind about five times within the first minute. I'd finally settled on heading up the steep slope toward Cock Hill in a clock wise direction, but having seen the aforementioned lad in tight Swedish top take no more than a cursory glance at his race map, then set off like a march hare in an anti-clockwise direction along the much flatter Roman Road, I thought "Crikey, he looks like he knows what he's doing, I'll follow him." That was about the last I saw of him until about 3 hours hence, but more of him later.

Things were progressing well and I'd chalked off four controls and 120 points within about fifty minutes or so and was slap bang in the middle of Shelf Moor on a bearing heading toward the 70 pointer at Bleaklow Stones. And then it starting snowing. Then about three minutes later it started snowing a bit more heavily. Then about five minutes after that, it *really* started snowing. I could barely see ten yards in front of me and the snow was driving horizontally into my eyes as I tried to follow my bearing. At which point I stopped and thought "I haven't a clue where I am here, simple as that" which is not a good place to be, especially when you then stumble across aircraft wreckage, which adds that extra shot of adrenaline to the mix! But trusting



my bearing and timing I arrived in the vicinity of control 9 at Bleaklow Stones and voila, there it was! Boom! Dib in and dip yer bread for 70 points, happy days! Jim Trueman of Pennine Fell Runners landed at a similar time and I felt like I was in good company. Your confidence can ebb and flow in these events; find a tough control like this out in the driving snow and you feel like Ray Mears on steroids. On bad days, sometimes you couldn't find the Eiffel Tower on a clear day in Paris. But at this moment, I was pumped and up for the cup. On a fresh bearing and off in high spirits to find control 15 and a guaranteed 30 points then onto checkpoint 7 and another 60 points, how hard can this be?! But the score event Gods were having none of it, and great levellers that they are, the next forty minutes or so were spent desperately trying to find these two.

The sense of frustration at times like these is hard to describe. You know you are close and in the right vicinity, but you just can't nail the little blighters. All sorts of thoughts run through your head: the map is wrong, my compass must have packed in, have some kids childishly moved the control somewhere for a laugh? Etc etc But alas, deep down, we all know the truth is that, somehow, somewhere, you've made a mistake. And a costly one at that.

With the clock ticking down, and the snow now getting heavier thoughts now switched to getting home, and avoiding the dreaded points cull for being late. No way Jose was I giving any of these points back after all that

had gone on the last two hours or so, no matter how low my score, I had to get back in time. Still stuck high up in the cloud and not able to decipher the map, my only option was to take a bearing west and head that way, and lose height in the hope of getting out of the clag and being able to recognise a thing or two. Thankfully, I emerged out of the cloud around Yellow Slacks, managed to get my head round the map again and it was head down for home.

I staggered back to the scout hut with about three minutes left and was absolutely goosed, carding a very mediocre 210 points. The rough ground, the snow, the extra adrenaline of being totally lost had badly taken its toll and I was cream crackered. As I slumped in the chair with a lifesaving brew and a fist full of custard creams, I noticed that the lad I was sat next to was Swedish base layer fella who I'd been with at the start. "How did you get on mate?", I asked sportingly, expecting a tale of woe like mine. "Yeah, not bad thanks, 500," he replied.

I nearly dropped my brew. 500? How on earth could someone get 500 out there today?! FIVE FLIPPIN HUNDRED! The lad in question was none other than Jonny Malley, of Ambleside AC who had run perhaps the race of the whole series, even putting Richard Robinson in the shade who had also somehow pulled in an astonishing 500, but had taken him slightly longer. Humbled is not the word!

Round 3 - Grindleford

Race three took us to Grindleford, a beautiful village to the west of Sheffield that I'd never been to before – another bonus of Peak Raid events. That week we'd had some heavy snow in Hebden Bridge so it was touch and go if I'd be able to get out. But some digging out the day before had got my car clear and I was ready to go Sunday morning. I wasn't missing this one. After the misery of Old Glossop I was determined to make amends and card a decent score this week. I'd invested in a new Silva Jet thumb compass, trying to look like a pro, and had spent that week struggling to work out how to use it.

Another testing course configured by Dave, this time with the 70 pointer set pretty much in the middle of the map and not out on a limb as tends to be the case. On receipt of map I decided on a clockwise route reasonably quickly and set off with a plan in mind. With a couple of controls under my belt in good time, I should have held course and headed north to CP 3, but the lure of the 70 pointer did its work again and I was pulled off course toward it. I found it no problem which is always a relief, but my plan was now out of the window and the clock was ticking. I cracked on to CP3 at Hook's Car for the 50 points but it took much longer than I'd bargained for. Up on the tops the snow was still quite heavy too and visibility wasn't great so constant checking of the map sucked up valuable time. There was also that dreaded feeling of arriving at where you think the CP is, this time the clue was 'boulder NW side' and saying desperately to yourself, "please be there, please be there, please be there..." To my huge relief, it was.

From here, there was a text book illustration of how a decent run can unravel in a short space of time. Inexperience with the thumb compass in taking a ropey bearing from the trig near Cowper Stone meant instead of picking up 5,4,7 & 6 and then heading home in good order, I was now scratching around, in the snow looking for CP7. It was more like Grindelwald than Grindleford! It was evident I wasn't where I thought I was on the map, that killer blow in any score event. Expletives filled the air and an exasperating "FFS - Not again!" sense of frustration. However, what these events teach you is that you must stay calm, get your head on, and sort yourself out. 6km from home and the 3-hour mark ticking down is no place to feel sorry for yourself, you've got to man-up.

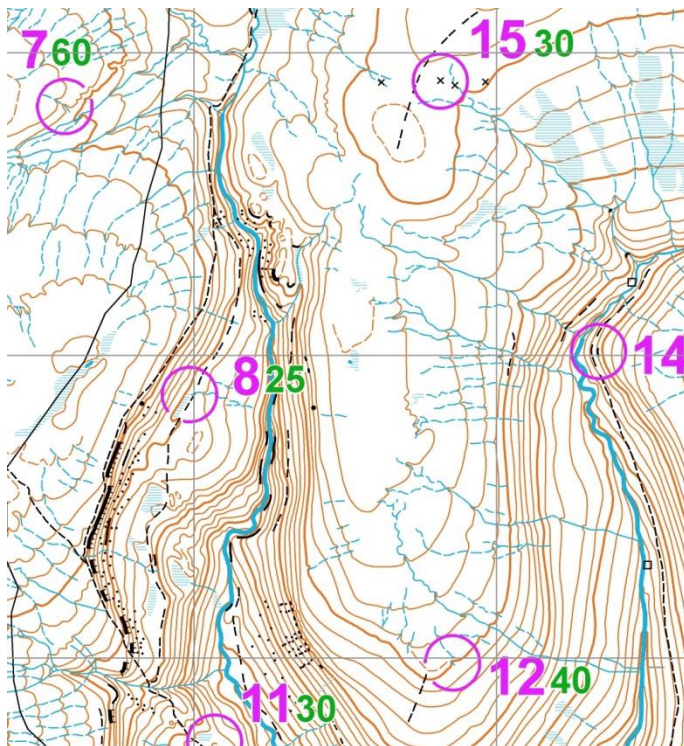
As a group of walkers huddled against a boulder on Burbage Rocks to keep warm, I knew I had to find CP 7 and its precious cargo of 60 points to give me a respectable score. Now aware of the extra level of skill needed to use the thumb compass I was very careful to stick to my new bearing taken from Burbage Rocks, and carefully followed it, toward, thank the lord, the CP awaiting at the small cairn. I dibbed in to great relief and then checked my watch. If the first hour of a score event can pass quite sedately, the last half-hour vanishes like sand through a faulty egg timer. Each time you look at your watch the minutes have dissolved, and the grim reaper time keeper is waiting to snaffle all your points if you are remotely late. I hit the gas full speed and

came flying down toward CP 6, bagged the points, then it was handbrake off, eyeballs out to get home in time. I double dropped two gels and felt the caffeine rush immediately then hit the afterburners. I just scraped home, a broken man, with forty-nine seconds left, delighted not to have given any back

Round 4 - Crowden

Race four was back to Crowden, in the heart of Peak District and Pennine Way country. Although not snowy, there was a fair bit of mist for this one which always adds to the mix. There was the usual buzz in the building as people got ready and pondered what Dave might have in store. *Galactico* Richard Robinson was present, looking to cement his crown from last year, but needing a good performance to complete his three counters as he missed the first one at Edale.

I opted for an anti-clockwise route this time and headed off in good shape toward Hey Moss. As usual, I got off to a decent start and on my way toward CP15 at the plane wreck at Meadow Clough, I was overtaken by the Richard Robinson, and thought "Yes, tremendous, I'm on the right road here, anti-clockwise was definitely the right choice. What'll do for Richard will do for me." We dibbed in one after another, when rank delusion set in once more. I must have got a bit star struck seeing Richard and bizarrely assumed he had the same plan as me: head for CP7 & 60 points. I might as well follow him, The Don, for as long as I can keep up with him and save myself a bit of bother. Such a clever plan.



However, Richard was heading south for CP 12, not west for CP7, and it took a while for my daft head to realise this – about as long as it took for him to disappear from view which was about 500m. So there I was, kippered once more, no bearing and not where I should be on the map. What a donut. Thankfully, the mist wasn't too bad at this point and running on a while brought me out above The Castles, a distinct feature which let me get my bearings once again, but also once again, with my preferred plan well and truly out of the window. I readjusted and headed for CP8, then back north to CP7 for the juicy 60 pointer.

"Keep it together and don't lose your rag," was my mantra at this point, a decent score is still on the cards and the 70 pointer at Blindstones was still up for grabs. I had to find that, simply had to, no matter what. Using Chew Reservoir as my marker I took a bearing off the southern dam end, girded my loins, and headed off the 500m or so to find it. At which point a thick, eerie Tolkeinesque clag came wafting its way over and visibility shrank to best part of nada. "Here we go again," I thought and I stopped dead to take in my surroundings. I was almost on it, but couldn't see a thing hardly. "Where is the little blighter?" Map, terrain, map, terrain, compass, terrain, map.....must be round here somewhere. At which point a fellow runner, whose name I don't know unfortunately, emerged out of the mist and graciously said "Just over there mate, 20 yards." And indeed it was. I dibbed-in, 70 points, phew! That is another thing I love about these events is that there is a tremendous camaraderie between competitors; people are co-operative and willing, and will tip you the wink when you're in the vicinity of a CP. Thanks again, whoever that was.

Need to head home now and get the last three then I'm done, but once again Rakes Moss would have the last word. For me, these are the hardest of all controls to find, ones on featureless, sodden moor, strewn with gullies and re-entrants, where you've little or no reference points to bounce off. Rakes Moss, Mount Skip,

Featherbed Moss are such areas and CP 1 was right in among this unyielding trio. The clue was 'small pond' and I succeeded in finding a pond or two, but none with a red and white Silva control box next to it. Drat and double drat once more! With hindsight, the better move would have been to head due south from CP 9 to CP3, which should have been easier to find it being in the prominent clough at Armfield Moor. It was longer to get there, but the probability of finding it was much stronger, and would have meant less time farting around trying to find CP1. This would have enabled me to collect CP4 and CP10 too on the way home. Oh, for some foresight rather than hindsight! Alas, CP1 would have to be left for another day and yet again, I would need to tap in the co-ordinates for hyperspace to get home in time, which for me is not a pretty sight after 2 ¾ hours heavy running. I arrived home with three minutes left, happy that it meant I'd not given Dave any points back over the four events, but knowing that my score of 290 should have been more had I not gone goggle-eyed at Richard Robinson, or been another scalp of Rakes Moss. But hey-ho, you learn from every one.

Summary

All in all, another superb series from Explorer Events. The weather certainly played its part, having a hand in two and a serious impact in one. Few who ran at Old Glossop will forget that day. The series was won by the superb Richard Robinson of Nottingham Orienteers, with Richard Hunt and Glen Borrell of Dark Peak pushing him close. It's a shame Jonny Malley couldn't have shown for more events but maybe next year as that would be a fascinating battle between him and Richard. Personally, I have improved no end as a score eventer, despite regular encounters with calamity and stupidity. These events are designed to do exactly that: severely test your outdoor skill and ability under time pressure, and I love them for doing just that. My wife is especially happy that they are all done now, as I am now not spending the entire following week examining the race map rueing my errors and cloth-headedness. She does despair at just how long a man can actually look at a map for! My goal for next year is to do a 400 pointer and then aim to do them consistently and cut out the silly errors. Bring on next year.



Kit List: (we all love a kit list ☺)

Shoes: Salomon Fellraiser – excellent fell shoe for contouring and muddy terrain

Base layer: Devold long sleeve, merino or Helly Lifa top – essential

Top: Patagonia Nano Puff vest – my fave piece of kit and utterly indispensable. Gives you that option of staying warm when the elements close in, as they often do this time of year, but vents and cools just as easily in milder conditions.

Jacket: Patagonia Alpine Houdini – waterproof, featherlight and packable. Brilliant jacket. Performs extremely well in foul weather for something so light.

Pants: Montane Minimus – I hardly ever wear my waterproof pants, the weather has to be bordering on atrocious for me to pull them out. As such I want something that takes up as little space in the pack as possible, but still gets me through kit check. These are the smallest and lightest I'm aware of on the market (let me know if you think otherwise) and pack down really small. When called upon though, they more than do the job and can be pulled on in seconds.

Shorts: Ron Hill – standard stuff

Socks: Ron Hill mono – the red and navy ones with a bit of Merino in. Superb fit and the merino gives you that extra bit of warmth

Tights: SUB thermal tights – another brilliant and essential piece of kit IMO. A lifesaver at Old Glossop.

Gloves: DeFeet merino – these are cycling gloves but are perfectly good for running. They're snug and warm, and with rubber palms and fingers; excellent grip for handling map bag

2 x Buffs - one used as headband to keep sweat out of eyes and the other loose around neck, can be pulled up over face if weather gets really bad.

Hat: Ron Hill hat for normal weather days or Patagonia synchilla duck bill for snow/blizzard days.

SOS Survival bag – small, light and compact. Thankfully I'm yet to use it.

Packs: either Osprey Talon 8litre waist pack if the forecast is ok, or OMM Classic 25 pack if forecast is not so clever, to take a couple of extra layers, namely a Patagonia Nano Puff long sleeve pullover, and some proper Primaloft gloves for if it gets really cold and my fingers start going.

Food: 6 x GU Energy gels. I've tried various but these are easily the best IMO. They taste great and you get an immediate kick off them. The Roctane ones are awesome, barely legal if you ask me. They're not cheap and quite hard to get hold of in the UK, but they are well worth it. Far better runners than me swear by them too! I have one just before the start then one every 30-40 mins, or as needed.

Drink: I'm a big fan of OTE Sports energy drink, either vanilla or lemon & lime. I drink a full one (500ml) on the way over in the car, then have a full one in my pack for the race.

Compass: Silva Race S Jet

Watch: Garmin Forerunner 220 – excellent, easy to use, syncs rapidly with Strava. I've had a Suunto Ambit in the past but didn't like it one bit.

App: Strava. What else?! The best app out there bar none. Friend me at Jim Mosley

Happy New Year everyone and hope you find what you're looking for in 2017 ...)

Jim Mosley 31/12/16