

OMM (Formerly KIMM) 2006
By Norma Rea

This years OMM was in the Galloway Hills; a short 30 mile road trip from the Stranraer ferry. Myself and Steph made up BARF's total representation amidst a 3000 strong list of competitors.

We arrived at the event HQ at Talnotry at around 8.30pm on the Friday evening. It was already dark and the heavy rain beating against the car window made for a formidable welcome.

On arrival we were informed that we had to make a round trip of a few miles down a one way forest lane, back out to the road and on to the overnight camp site before we could register. However, an honest answer to a straight forward question plus a little confusion found us misdirected to park on the forest lane beside registration and with the Dubarry boots¹ on we obediently trudged off through ankle deep mud to make ourselves known to the officials.

At registration we were issued with a 'hang around your neck' variety of electronic tag² and directed off to the catering tent where unmarked maps of the area were on display. Much to our surprise these were void of any place names or contour heights and this led to some interesting (though not necessarily helpful) conversations with fellow competitors on the navigational implications of this.

With the future of the shinny new altimeter now in doubt, we headed off to the gear tent. Here Steph joined me in the obligatory identification of a new and 'urgently needed now I realise its on offer' piece of kit. A search for gas was brought to an end when we were informed that unfortunately due to a miscalculation on behalf of store organizers all gas would have to be ordered and delivered to our camp site the following evening. 'Would we mind?!' And so, with our gas delivery organized and new gear purchased we headed back through the rain to the car.

Driving along the one way forest track we became distracted with the thought of how nice it would be to camp beside the car and somehow never quite made it out to the road or the official overnight camp site.

As ever, the time to get up on Saturday morning came much too quickly and with darkness and rain still upon us we began to question what we were doing here and why had we ever thought that entering an event of this nature at this time of year was a good idea?

¹ Posh welly boots for the serious kit person!

² Yip that's as technical as I get.

Our start time was 9.29am. Yet again the Celtic rebel in us opted to ignore all instructions that this could not be changed and attempt to be upgraded to an earlier start time. This time we were to be defeated and so at 9.29am we meekly passed through the start gate and headed off to board our allocated bus.

Just under an hour later we were finally unleashed into the wilds of the Scottish lowlands to begin our official journey at GR 362 869. For most competitors this was to begin with a visit to a nearby portaloo, before marching as fast as possible north north easterly up yet another long forest track to point one at the forest edge.

Visibility quickly closed in around us as we ascended north easterly from point one to point two. Nearing the top of this col two Swedes unexpectedly appeared out of the mist to request the definition of a spur.

With visibility below ten meters much of the rest of day one was spent catching, passing or being passed by shadows in the mist. We also spent much of the day ankle (and sometimes knee) deep in bog. However, the small glimpses of surrounding countryside we did catch were beautiful and as the day progressed, the rain eased making life altogether more pleasant.

With so many competitors it is inevitable that tracks appear from one point to the next and by point three the temptation to follow took over. Despite having agreed our route choice we skipped off down one of these newly created tracks muttering something along the lines of, 'but our bearing is not going this direction'. Of course this leave of senses was short lived as first one and then a second wall appeared out of the mist to confirm we weren't entirely sure where we now were. As we squatted over the map to confer we were joined by another competitor seeking our opinion on our current location. Two different responses from us confirmed for him that perhaps he best stick to his own calculations. To this unknown hero we say a huge thanks. A third wall, a bearing and a second confer with him sorted the issue out and we were soon back on route, lesson well and truly learnt.

Unknown to us at the time, our route on day one was to take us from Kirriereoch, out past Cross Burn Bothy and on to Nick of Carclach. From here we turned south east to locate a boulder to the south west of the Rig of Millmore, then off around the eastern side of Kirriereoch Hill and across Kirriereoch Burn to a second spur on the lower westerly slopes of Merrick. A direct bearing took us south south east to crags to the south of Benhan, and then south south west along walls and through forest to finish at the Old Caldons camping field in Glen Trool on the western side of Galloway Park.

We reached camp at 3.35pm; relieved to be in while it was still day light and with a few hours to spare to organize ourselves. The campsite was an

official Forestry Commission one which has closed in recent years and so unusually pleasant for an event of this nature; sheltered, with a great expanse of flattish ground to choose from. This said, Steph does maintain I found the only bump in the field to park our tent (and her bed space) on top of and insisted on reminding me of this on several occasions. Not that her camp skills are perfect you understand. Left to her own devices in the tent for a few minutes she first opted to try out and then burst a balloon in my balloon bed, and in a second separate incident spill the entire contents of the porridge pot. I wasn't sure if I was greeted with a compliment or an insult when I arrived back to find her scooping half cooked porridge oats off the ground and declaring, 'I knew you wouldn't mind if I rescued this'.

On day two we emerged from the tent at around 6.30am having been awoken at 6am by a very efficient tannoy system reminding us to put our clocks back one hour. Clear blue skies provided the first opportunity to admire our surroundings and the glint of damp autumnal colours added to the beauty of the rugged hills around us. Official reports suggest this was the first time that the sun has shone during a Galloway KIMM/OMM and it was most welcome.

Our start time was 8.33am and having discovered that we were the leading ladies team overnight a quiet anticipation descended as we set about organizing ourselves for the day ahead. We had a 17 minute lead on the next ladies team. Were the events of the Mourne Mountain Marathon about the repeat themselves? We hoped not.

Navigation was a much more straight forward task on day two and we felt we moved along at a good strong pace all day. Our route first took us easterly to a knoll to the north of Mulldonock before turning south to skirt the westerly flank of Mulldonock towards a stream bend on the lower north western slopes of Larg Hill. From here a direct bearing took us north easterly to a pond on the eastern side of Lamachen Hill, before continuing south east past Black Lock and the White Lochan of Drigmorn, across the summit ridge of Millfore and down to a stream junction to its south. Our last check point on the open mountain was on top of the Fell of Talnostry. A fast mud slide down a forest fire break took us to point six at a path junction in the forest and then down a steep rocky path to the finish at 12.40pm.

An extremely thorough kit check completed the day and with the contents of our rucksack regrouped we headed off for our complimentary meal at Wilfs. Further anticipation descended as we awaited our turn to view the results board two hours later. One check followed by a second confirmed there were no ladies teams in front of us and it appeared we may have gained the first place we had been hoping for.

After prize giving it was a quick visit to the gear tent to spend our winnings before jumping in the car and heading home happy that these Cinderellas' had finally got to the ball. On the ferry we remarked at how satisfying it had been to go out and compete in unknown territory and for us Irish to win in a predominantly English/Scots based event.

An inspection of the split times has since confirmed that our real competition (team 749) had been in third place overnight, having made a navigational error between point three and four on day one which cost them approx 30 mins. They had been the faster of the three leading female teams on four out of eight legs during day one. Our second place overnight rivals (team 660) only managed to be the fastest of the three leading ladies teams between point three and four on day one (I wonder how?).

We had been disappointed at the overnight camp to discover that all first leg times in our class for day one had been discounted. We felt this had been our fastest leg of the day. Split times would suggest that this alteration may have allowed both of our nearest rival female teams to gain between 12 and 15 mins on us. I was also puzzled to study the split times for day two to discover that we had been unusually slow during its first leg. Both of our female rival teams took between 42 and 45 mins to complete this leg. We took 1hr 09? Why? We moved fast, made no navigational errors and overtook a large number of competitors along the route. I have since rechecked the map to see if there could possibly have been a shorter route choice, but to no avail.

If this time is correct then it is possible that we nearly lost the competition to this leg, to finish just 2 mins 7 sec in front of team 749.

Further inspection of our finishing print out has revealed that our start time was recorded as 8.05am on day two; 28 mins before our actual start time. Could this be the reason? An overall time of 4 hrs 35 mins for day two certainly doesn't quite calculate.

It is likely that we will query this along with the somewhat less than advertised prize money. Yet, despite these hic-ups it is fair to say we thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Special thanks to the husbands Dave and Mark who held forts over the weekend and to Steph for the teamwork, company and the banter.

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