

Carnethy 5 - 11th February 2012

As someone who has only been to Striders about twice in the last year I do want you to know that I did feel a bit of a fraud as I pulled on my Striders vest for my first ever fell race on February 11th.

The race is apparently a classic in the fell runner calendar and is classed as a Category A race (apparently it's all worked out by how much ascent there is in relation to how many miles there are to 'run'). I use the word 'run' very loosely as I will explain later.

The race is called the Carnethy 5 (you run up 5 hills) approximately 10 miles South west of Edinburgh. Registration is in Beeslack High School and then everyone is driven to the start in a fleet of coaches. The start of the race is just over the wall of a busy A road with only one lay by so parking is impossible.

The race began at 2pm but prior to that there was time for a bit of a warm up, a worrying look at what was facing me and a wee at the corner of the field; these fell runners aren't a bit shy about communal weeing! The gun went off at 2pm and it was like a scene from Braveheart with 500 people (many dressed in kilts) ran across the field and through the bog towards the gap in the wall. I had thought (rather foolishly as it happened!) that I might be able to keep my feet dry but there was no chance! The first hill (Scald Hill) came into view; I glanced up at the top briefly but not again. If I had looked up at what was in front of me I think I would have stopped there and then. The hill just went on and on and on. Only the top runners manage to run it all so the majority of us had hands on thighs pumping, doubled up and walking as fast as we could to the summit. All I kept thinking was "there is another big one like this right at the end!". I managed a brief jog as I spotted the photographer and then it was back to a doubled up power walk. Then it was down, shortish up, down, steepish up, very, very down, medium up and a huge heathery decent and a lovely flat bit before the final ascent of Carnethy itself.

I sounded like I was giving birth as I grunted and groaned my way up and then after hitting the false summit I just wanted to cry! Still I kept going but the joy of running around the cairn at the top was short lived as the final descent was just pure hell! It was so--s-o-o-o steep and knee high in heather so you had to lift your, already aching legs, really high to 'dance' your way down. At the bottom was the final 'sprint', back through the bog, slightly uphill to the finish. To beat my target of 1 and half hours I had to push myself like I've never pushed before and I was rewarded with a time of 1:29:03. My legs were shaking and I was totally overcome with emotion!

I have never done anything so physically and mentally demanding in my life and am not sure if I want to do anything like that again although It would be lovely to go back and do it at a non-race pace to take in the amazing views at a more leisurely pace! If you are bored and want to get a flavour of the race there is a video (I'm not in it) on youtube. It's the one called Carnethy 5 2012 New Version. It has a

great soundtrack to it and I was about 8 mins behind the guy who is featured in the video.

By the way, I was 423 out of 523 and 9th out of 21 in my category. Pleased to say there were many younger people from proper hill running clubs behind me.

Any takers for next year? I'll give you the directions but I may not come with you!

Kim Taylor