

# **Dark Peak Profile**

## **by Paul Sanderson and Roger Woods**

As a young lad living just south of Manchester I spent many days walking across Kinder and Bleaklow. I would sometimes ponder whether it was Dark Peak or Dark Peat but it did not seem an important thing to get to the bottom of. Jumping across peat groughs made me heave with joy and youthful logic suggested the correct name was Dark Peat as I used to come home covered in the stuff. Time has done little to change my mind.

The distinctive brown vests with the purple and gold hoops have been a feature in fell running for almost three decades. In fact it always amazes me that no matter what part of the country you are in or what race you are competing in there will nearly always be an encouraging shout of, "Come on Dark Peak" from somewhere on route. Sometimes conversational comments such as, "You wear those brown vests" accompany the obvious facial distaste that reminds me of the look on Margot's face when Tom from the Good Life emerges in his home made green suit. Confusingly there are at least four different regularly used versions of the vests - Jim Fulton even has a lovely hand knitted version which comes out on special winter occasions (there are matching hand knitted green shorts but fortunately I have never seen these !). The club colours were carefully chosen and represent the peat, grass, sun and heather of the Dark Peak. The numerous versions of vest reflect in a way the makeup of the club - it is not just one big club but lots of little clubs all loosely stuck together by the pastime/hobby/passion/obsession of fellrunning.

Formed in 1976 by Chris Worsell and a group of like minded individuals out of a need to establish a club to meet the needs of all local fell runners in the South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire area Dark Peak Fell Runners quite quickly grew from strength to strength. Today membership is over 300 with teenage runners through to V70 - though I guess most are in the V40 category. Many combine their love of fellrunning with cycling, orienteering, climbing and walking and can easily move from one to another. It is unlikely however that back in 1976 Eric Mitchell would have believed he would still be club President 28 years later.

Achievements for a club are one mark of success, however what probably has made Dark Peak special is in some ways not measured by athletic achievement but rather its rich source of character and personalities. Fell running as a sport does tend to attract more than its fair share of eccentrics and Dark Peak over the years has attracted more than most and this in part is what has made the club special. What probably symbolises this more than anything else is the annual award of the 'Pertex Trophy' at the club dinner. This award is given to the club member who has over the year demonstrated a level of navigational buffoonery in the mountains that far exceeds anybody else's. Although it is not the most sought after trophy the roll of 'dishonour' over the years has managed to encompass a number of the club's best runners and we have never been short of suitable recipients. Therefore a word of warning when racing in the Peak District - be careful if you are following someone in a brown vest, they may have even less of an idea of their whereabouts than you do.

The club meets every Wednesday night often at its "club hut" which is thought to be an old POW hut just behind the Sportsman pub on the western edges of Sheffield. In the winter about 30 or so runners meet at the Sportsman to run on the roads with about 10 "warts" (short for stalwarts) who continue to run on the moors aided by a mishmash of torches, hip flasks and friendship. In the summer the runs steadfastly stick to the moors and the numbers attending generally increases with a mixture of runs from the hut and various favourite locations in the Peak, club races, and local races. Annual organised events include an AGM in May, club championships and dinner dance in November, and a weekend get together in the Peak in late summer as well as entering teams in the Ian Hodgson, the FRA and the Calderdale Way Relays.

Runners come to the club for many reasons - be it winter training runs for the Sheffield Student Orienteers and South Yorkshire Orienteers or a focal point for passion-filled obsessive fell runners. It is a rather loosely organised bunch of enthusiasts of all speeds, preferred distances, and aptitudes. Some couldn't navigate their way out of their own house and others like nothing better than to Worsell someone - that is to drop back in a race, take an alternative route/short cut and end up in front complete with self-satisfied grin.

### **Going The Distance**

Since its formation in 1976 Dark Peak has had a long association with the distance challenges such as the Bob Graham Round. Past club members such as Martin Stone and Helene Diamantides were prominent in establishing the precedent that has continued to this day.

The association with the Bob Graham has been probably the most well established. In fact since 1976 only one year has gone by when there wasn't an attempt and this was due to the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001. Most fell runners have probably at some point heard mention of the so called 'Dark Peak BG machine' which gives the impression that all any self respecting contender has to do is just turn up and Dark Peak will take you round the BG. This view in some ways does a disservice to all those who have achieved their goal and got round and in any case the number of high profile failures that we've had over the years goes to prove there is no certainty in the outcome. What Dark Peak has got is a pool of experience that has been established over the years that is used to the full - those that complete it are usually more than happy to help with support for quite a few years. Besides, what other club has members like Mike Hayes who has done the BG wearing a heart rate monitor and then downloaded the data for the whole route onto his computer!

In the history of Dark Peak one of the finest achievements, and a feat yet to be repeated is the double Bob Graham round within 48 hours by Roger Baumeister in 1979. The original account of this mammoth undertaking, edited by Martin

Stone and first published in Dark Peak News, makes epic reading. What is equally amazing is that a month later, having accompanied Roger for a significant proportion of his double BG Brian Harney broke the then record for the Pennine way achieving a time of 3 days 42 minutes.

As well as its well documented association with the Bob Graham Round Dark Peak has a rich history associated with the other long distance challenges. From the mid 1980's, when Martin Stone first broke the record for the Paddy Buckley, interest in the Welsh Classic round, although initially slow with only one successful attempt in the 1990's, has steadily increased over the years. In fact in the last three years Dark Peak have recorded five successes on this challenging round - the most recent by the staggering margin of sixty-six seconds under the 24 hours.

The Ramsey Round has probably seen the least amount of attention, however of special note must be made of Bob Berzins' unsupported round in 1991.

As you would expect from a club that is growing old (dis)gracefully the Joss Naylor Challenge from Pooley Bridge to Greendale Bridge has been given a fair share of attention over the years. As well as a number of sub 18 hour successes from the over sixties (Colin Henson, Roger Baumeister and Dick Pasley) a number of sub 12 hour successes have now been recorded over the last few years (Dave Lockwood, Alan Yates and Ken Jones).

Closer to home Dark Peak have over the years developed some club challenges of its own. Possibly the best known is the '15 trigs'. This challenge requires a visit to each of the 15 trig points detailed on the Harvey's Map of the Dark Peak used in the 1984 KIMM in under 15 hours. This round, by tradition unsupported, starts at either the Sportsman at Lodge Moor or the Royal Hotel in Hayfield.

In 1994 by way of celebrating the centenary of the parish of Bradfield, the largest parish in England, a number of Dark Peak undertook to 'beat the bounds'. This necessitated a mid-winter run of approximately 50 miles around the parish boundary and includes notable Peak district landmarks such as Swains Head, Barrow and Grinah Stones, Back Tor and Stanage Edge. This has now become somewhat of a club tradition and this year we will be celebrating our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

### **Races**

Over the years Dark Peak has been associated with the organisation of a number of races from the British Relay Championships to local club classics such as the Cakes of Bread, Margery Hill, Alport and Crookstone Crashout as well as the classic long "A" tests of the Edale Skyline and Marsden to Edale, and local Peak District races such as the Burbage and others in the Hope valley.

The Edale Skyline has for many years been the first long A race of the season and as such has been a championship race on a number of occasions in the past. Traditionally it has been organised to coincide with when the clocks go forward - a scheduling that on occasion has seen a number of runners turn up an hour after the start !! Although it has seen a number of course alterations over recent years its testing nature and the character of the event has not diminished.

Historically this support for races is not however restricted to the Peak District. Back in 1983 Donald Booth of Dark Peak was responsible for revitalising the then Bens of Jura Fell race. Although it was originally run in the early 1970's for four years it wasn't until Don's involvement, with the added support of the Isle of Jura distillery that the race become truly established on the calendar. Support for the now renamed Isle of Jura Fell Race continues to this day. Although Don is no longer involved in the organisation on many occasions club members have often exceeded twenty runners with many returning every year. Probably Dark Peak's finest achievement was in 1985 when the race was won by one of our top runners of the day, the late Ray Aucott in a time of 3.18.36. For this achievement Ray took home 2.5 gallons of whisky for first place, first vet and first team. Not bad for someone who didn't even drink whisky.

Without fell running and fell races life can be a bit dull – foot and mouth taught me that – and I'm glad there is a fell running club in Sheffield. For me there is now't special about Sheffield other than it is right next to the Peak District and without the freedom to enjoy the Peak District or some similar place I would feel lost and imprisoned. Dark Peak Fell Runners is part of all that. The club has evolved to cater for all aptitudes, speeds and preferences and there has always been a number of talented and committed runners in the club who compete well in the wider world of running – their talents spread across short and long fell races to orienteering and mountain marathons. Behind these elite runners there is the rest. In the end it all about enjoying running and nothing else – Dark Peak fell runners do just that.