



## Round 1 The Black Mountains 23 March 2013

### Paul Blundell's Report



I arrived with Tiff Hanley, Ian Hawker and Sue Sleath at race headquarters Friday night in time to register for the might contain nuts 33mile ultra.

The forecast was for the coldest march weekend for some years and we were somewhat disappointed to learn that the course we had recce'd over Christmas was not to be used but a shorter bad weather course was to be substituted at around 24 miles.

We retired to our lodgings and met up with Martin Loveless to discuss tactics over beer and a few bottles of wine.

Sue was a little sore after a cycle accident and was expecting to marshal but the prospect of a shorter 2 lap course encouraged her to consider walking the route.

Saturday we woke to heavy snow but the gritters had been out and we arrived on time at the start where we met John McKenzie who was going to see us off. After shivering our way through a lengthy roll call, we were off. Sue had decided to give running a go and Hardley stuck together as a group.

A few runners had huskies which were dragging there owners up the mountain with them, but I saw two jack Russell size dogs amongst others. The route continues up the mountain for quite a way. The snow was laying thicker the further up we went and a strong northeast wind was creating blizzard conditions.

More and more clothes went on and I was really glad of my waterproof socks and gloves.

A marshal was trudging back down the line of competitors warning of ice. I didn't really take him seriously until we turned back downhill and after a little way we found ourselves running alongside the track in deep snow trying to stay off a path of solid ice.



Runners were skating slipping and falling all around us and the strong wind was trying to blow us down the mountainside away from where we were trying to head.

The huskies were trying to drag there owners over the ice and one lady was crouching over her wire haired fox terrier trying to warm him up.

The track split in two and we were supposed to be following the right hand track however we were on the left of the track so slowly and laboriously we dragged ourselves on hands and knees across against the wind to the right hand side.

We were the able to run the rest of the way and as we descended, conditions improved dramatically.

Once down in the valley at the first checkpoint it felt a lot warmer, but then we started the next ascent back into the elements, it was tough but conditions were much better than that first mountain.

We went up over another mountain before another descent taking great care not to slip.

After more of the same we reached the site of a hill fort, a very steep and slippery climb before a descent where I think everybody fell at least once. Sue slipped down in a sitting position, Martin couldn't stop and if I could have stood upright for long enough, I would have some great photos.

The last leg of the first lap was down a track which did a good impression of a stream. It was very rough and hard to run on so it was with great relief that we reached the next checkpoint before starting the next lap.

Sue was starting to feel quite sore from her cycling injuries so elected to do the 1 lap and complete the trail race.

I took Martins lead and put on some sunglasses to try and keep the snow at the top of the 1st climb from stinging my eyes and we headed on up.



It had stopped snowing but the strong wind was whipping the snow off the mountainside hiding the path as we went on and reducing visibility severely, even more of a white out than the first time around.

We all reached the top and the route was marked any way they could, think snowballs with tape tied around .... Forewarned, we turned down and kept to the right of the track avoiding the ice quite well this time however the muddy slushy track further down was very churned up and slippery.

My legs were getting quite sore, I don't think I was alone, but we plodded on, and eventually reached the hill fort a lot quicker or so it seemed than the 1st time around .

The descent this time was very churned up and I and slid down the hill using a fence to slow me down and stay upright.

Then it was that long rocky track/stream again but with no runners in sight we made painful and slow progress before reaching the final 4mile road section.

Running on the road now was hard on the legs and we settled into a trot until we saw 2 runners ahead. Martins eyes lit up as he said, "We've got to catch them!".

A collective groan indicated that we didn't share Martin's view but nevertheless we increased our speed and eventually overtook 3 more runners before arriving at the finish, tired and cold but pleased.

Tiff was 2nd vet lady, but we were all winners in our own eyes....

