

## **RACE REPORT FOR ORIGINAL MOUNTAIN MARATHON BY** **PETER ALLANACH**

Last weekend, (30 / 31 October) my team partner John and I took part in and completed the original Mountain Marathon in Dartmoor, and what an awesome weekend it was! Having arrived in Dartmoor on the Friday afternoon, John and I began to check through the event instructions and came across two interesting points that we hadn't previously noticed – firstly the organisers had decided that because Dartmoor wasn't strictly a mountainous area, they were increasing the course from 45 miles to somewhere in the region of 49, and secondly that because of heavy rain turning streams into fast flowing impassable small rivers, we had to be extremely cautious.

We set off at around 8 am on the Saturday morning from Okehampton Camp, on the north side of the moors, and began to make steady progress through the first few checkpoints which were spaced out between 3 and 5 miles apart. We were running in the A Class category, which was made up of around a hundred two person teams. On top of that there were other classifications in the event which resulted in lots of bodies moving with haste over the moor, giving the effect of ants scurrying across a forest floor.

Saturday's navigation required us to cover approximately 30 miles across country visiting 8 key checkpoints (small orienteering markers) before finishing at the overnight camp area where all the teams were to camp. The day had passed well. A lovely sunny spell had seen us replenishing our water bottles with river water before passing the doorway of what seemed to be a warm and inviting pub. I imagined a future time when I might revisit with my family and enjoy lunch, but not today! As the day turned towards late afternoon, our pace slowed and the distances between checkpoints seemed to get longer, making it harder to keep mental focus, a crucial factor in preventing navigational mistakes.

We arrived at the midway camp just as darkness was about to fall, and as the rain started! We forced ourselves to quickly pitch our micro one-man tents in the wind (which had been increasing all day in strength), working together with each tent to stop them blowing away. A quick trip to the toilets and the water supply area and we were straight undercover and warming up gradually with gas burners blazing and dehydrated chilli con carne on the menu for dinner. Having sorted the odd blister out it was time to change out of wet kit ready for the long night of – nothing! With mobile phones handed in at the beginning of the event, we were well and truly alone with our aches, pains and thoughts for the long night ahead, which saw us sleeping on a slight incline with the wind doing its upmost to destroy our tents.

Sunday morning was greeted with the sound of rain hammering on the tent, and the event organiser taking great delight in announcing that the event would recommence within the hour. Ridiculous thoughts of it being too wet to continue and that the race would surely be called off, soon disappeared into the reality of a disgusting breakfast of dehydrated bacon and onions, and getting the tents down. We were soon among what seemed like very keen looking teams to start once more on the quest of finding numerous check points in the middle of nowhere; twenty plus wet miles stretched out ahead of us. Apart from the incessant rain, which seemed constantly in my face, the day brought a new challenge - the flooded streams - fast flowing, deep and cold mini-rivers which were definitely on the wrong side of danger. Luckily for us a few other teams had joined us, they too in a dilemma about how to cross. We worked together as one big team, crossing at the shallowest looking point, which still managed to reach the top of our legs, and linking arms we managed to shuffle across.

Eventually after many moments of wondering what an earth I was doing there, John and I began to close in on the last few checkpoints. At this stage the weather had turned into mist giving us around 100m visibility. This was a testing time, particularly on the higher ground and we had to rely greatly on our compasses, checking and double-checking our direction. The last checkpoint was a concrete trig-point that incredibly someone had built on the top of a Tor. Noticing that several nearby teams were slightly ahead of us, we decided to make a direct cross country dash down from the tor towards Okehampton camp, the finishing point which we could clearly see in the distance, 1 mile away. We managed to cover this quickly as most of it was downhill, although we did have to negotiate a field of slippery and very sharp looking rocks just below the last checkpoint.

Having already tackled the OMM course in 2009 where we took detours, missed checkpoints, and suffered from hypothermia, this time round we crossed the finish line having been on the move for a total duration of 18 hours covering 49.3 miles (measured on a flat map). We'd crossed several rivers and ticked off 16 checkpoints, and amazingly did it all without taking any navigational detours! Our team position was 69<sup>th</sup> out of a total starting field of 103 teams. The feeling of achievement was immense, it really had been a very long way and although we were well equipped for another night had we been caught out, it was good to reach the finish line.

A week later and contemplating my Sunday Roast I ask myself the question – will we be doing this again next year and the answer is most definitely yes!