

ForestMan and BoskMan 2010

Well.....that was long weekend for us all wasn't it! Somehow 190 athletes managed to battle their way through what Brendan Foster would undoubtedly have described as "inhuman conditions" (I can't express it in Geordie fashion in print) to a finish line which must have seemed a long way off for a very long time. **Top effort, guys and gals!!** Somehow we managed to get through 2400litres of fluid....I'm presuming most of that was "worn" rather than drunk as noone was seen "wobbling" to the finish line...staggering, yes: wobbling, no! 6500 plastic cups (and only 4 found littering the course when we walked it Monday, so top effort there, too.) 350 bananas, not including the mad marshall wearing a banana suit.....1200 gels etc etc. Each year as we prepare for the race I am bemused at the staggering quantities required for such a small field with this year's heatwave clearly bumping up needs disproportionately.

But small as the event may be we like to think it is relatively "perfectly formed" with undoubtedly the greatest bunch of marshals anywhere and athletes who really appreciate them.

Oh, and a course that will test even the toughest of athletes physically and mentally. Only first timers are likely to set a personal best and although this year's winner.....and I will get on to the day's racing in a moment, I promise..... did manage to be the first person to break the ten hour mark....it is a long day out for most.

BUT BEAUTIFUL

Two races this year, the "ForestMan", our full "iron distance" event and The BoskMan, it's new little brother with a 2.6 km swim, 78 mile bike and 12 mile run. Both over the same course, the only difference, the number of laps.

So after all the briefings, racking etc on Saturday athletes begin to arrive from 4:15 Sunday morning, bringing with them what starts off as light mist but which gradually envelopes the lake until only the nearest buoys are visible.....certainly no way anyone can be expected to navigate safely across the course at either end. Short delay to discuss options with the Race referees and to liaise with our trusty Water Safety adviser in the hope the sun will burn through but no joy. Plan B (I know what it's like hanging round so let's crack on with a rearranged course that the canoeists can manage safely) Slightly short for the F'Men and very slightly long for the Bosks with the number of laps changing to 4 and 3 respectively.but a good swim and not too much time lost in the battle against dusk and cut off times at the end of the day. As it happen the mist doesn't burn off until the final two swimmers are exiting the lake. Hope everyone will understand that safety overrides accuracy in setting the course!

Now, as race organiser I don't get to see much of the race unfold but I see first hand that first ForestMan out of the water is Doug Hall with Adel Tyson-Bloor leading out the Forest(Wo)Men. Dave Woodgate heads up the "Bosk" and Nicole Walters is at the head of proceedings for the women. Fair to say that all four leaders know that they will be put under some severe pressure as the day unfolds with Hywel Davies, Debbie Shaw and Wayne Smith in particular, setting off in hot pursuit behind them.

For us the end of the swim means a swift relocation to Sandy Balls (about 6 miles up the road) to T2 and the finish. Meanwhile all the wet swim kit and street wear bags has to be transported to the finish line and sorted .

Brief the run station guys and get them on station.....for the next 12 hours!!!! Champs! Say goodbye to Paul who will take them to position and then look after restocking all the aid stations throughout the day. I next see Paul at about 8:30 in the evening!

Then set up timing mats, run out barriers, portaloos etc and suddenly the first BoskMen are already back...Dave Woodgate hanging on to a minute or so of his lead over Wayne, who looks ominously smooth as he cruises out on to the brutal run course. Only 12 miles but 10 of it off road, undulating...some might say "hilly"....and only shaded for 2 miles or so.

Now these guys have a good lead already but we can hear the regular cheers of spectators from the site entrance as the ForestMen swoop past to complete either lap one or two and gradually the number of athletes passing through the change tent begins to increase and accelerate. Nicole still leads but knows that her toughest test is still to come as she is

now being chased hard by Lydia Browning and Sharon Young. Stew Smith holds third place overall and leads the Vets with Jaks Howe heading up the Lady Vets category.

Quickly assemble the finish line and get ready to see who's back first. It's Woodie!!!!, he's held on.....with Wayne only metres behind but unable to find a sprint to match Dave. Turns out Wayne and Dave have been neck and neck for the past 6 miles...epic battle as the two of them pull out a 38 minute margin over third placed Stew Smith.

Lydia manages to run down Nicole and then hold off a fast charging Sharon Young with Nicole bravely hanging on to earn a hard fought third Place. No change in the other Vets categories with Jaks finishing alongside Team Feat team mate Dave Ransom who claims victory in the Super Vet category.

Almost too exciting already....so many friends and team mates in the prizes and the day is still only young.

Amidst all this excitement I manage to grab a few words with the new leader in the ForestMan as he passes through the Change Tent. It's Hywel Davies, experienced IronMan but even he knows that he is going to have to run "clever" to survive the heat and the tough terrain. He's built a good lead but Doug's a top athlete and a decent runner, not to mention other contenders such as Colin Lewin and last year's winner Austin Mills who all know how to pace themselves over the distance.

In fact, Colin's so "experienced" or "old" that he's even raced with me!!

Last Year's winner in the Ladies event, Debbie Shaw has made progress but it's still Adel at the head of proceedings and still a healthy margin. Diane Hier heads up the vets and always has a strong run....so who knows??

BoskMan presentation time, so its hugs and kisses all round as all the prizes seem to have been won by some of our closest tri buddies.....so that's nice!!

Then it's all about Hywel. Legend that he is, and great friend to RaceNewForest he smashes the course record and becomes the first to break the 10hr barrier over this tough, tough course.

9hrs 35mins and bits. His long sleeves (white to reflect the heat and keep the sun off), "walk up the steepest hills" strategy and decision to have a lie down in a manky stream to cool down!!!!....all vindicated and resulting in a dominant performance. Top bloke, top effort!!!

Then it's Doug, himself only just outside that 10hr mark, still smiling and happy to have put together such a solid race.....a man after my own heart his immediate post-race nutrition strategy includes a pint of lager!! A bit cruel in retrospect as Joanne, Paul and I were going to have to wait another 6 hrs or so until we could join in with the drinking!!

Third is Colin and Austin has battled through for fourth place.....so it's still friends and family time for us!!!

Now we have loud music and Stew has recovered sufficiently from the Bosk to pick up his mc duties....he's also donned a fantastic cerise t-shirt just to make me look even more dishevelled than I am by this stage!!! My Mother in Law (also helping out like a Trojan) later informs me that he was also sporting the smartest pair of shorts she's ever seen.....this makes me feel even more inadequate.

But I have to plough through this despair to greet our first lady over the line.....and this year's winner is.....last year's winner as Debbie Shaw reels in Adel to take the victory with Adel delighted to finish in a close second place on her debut over this distance. Then it's Diane followed by...can it be? It is!! Quickly grab Joanne and screech "It's Joan, it's Joan.....you'll have gathered..I was excited because it wasJoan Medland 4th over all, great girl, good friend and with a long history of failing even to get to the start line to achieve her Iron Distance ambition...and she's not only got round but she's in the prizes. Some tears at this point I think.....but not doing too badly so far this year in that respect.

More and more finishers, running in with children, carrying children...some who looked like they would prefer to be the one's being carried. People with enough residual energy to jump up and slap the finish banner.....you should have been trying harder!!!

Buffet starts.....another cruel act is played out in front of starving race directors. Try and do the Winners presentations and greet folk over the line and sort out their choice of finish music all at the same time.....with one microphone....thanks for bearing with us and apologies for the howling feedback, John!

So many stories, images, sights and sounds....there really is nothing quite like the finish line of any Iron Distance event. Not all good news...there are non-finishers and amongst them some close friends but we know they'll be back again. Andy Brockway on his Iron debut crashes on the bike course.....he finishes but my concern is for the beautiful Felt DA he bought off me last year....be more careful!!! I may need to borrow it back one day.....maybe. Dusk falls but noone has missed the run cut off out on the course.....so everyone is on their way "home".

Prizes out the front of the Bistro at the finish line.....what a venue. Thanks and cheers for all the marshals who have been, without exception, fantastic over a long, long hot day. Cheers for the medical folk, for the staff at Sandy Balls. Joanne and I dissolve into giggles (first beer, I promise) as we announce a prize winner and eventually someone gets up and wanders through the tables, comes right up to me and says....."do you know where the plates are for the buffet??.... Cue helpless laughter from brain dead organisers and total bemusement for the audience.

Slight altercation, then everyone's gone. Paul's back by now so find time for one more glass of beer before clearing away the finish and heading for bed.....end of a 46 hour shift, boy does that bed feel good.

Thanks to everyone who makes this possible but particularly those of you who put in crazy shifts alongside us....you know who you are and that we love you. To the athletes, you were stars, particularly the absence of litter etc and for bearing with us when things aren't as slick as they might be.

Did I mention?..... it's really quite a tough course **BUT BEAUTIFUL!!!!**

Same weekend next year and entries will open beginning of September.....perhaps we might get close to our 200 max next year. There must be at least that number of lunatics out there somewhere.

See you again

Rich (and Paul and Joanne of course!)