

Lairig Ghru Race

29th June 2008

Three Helm Hill runners (John King, Russ Cannon and I) headed to Braemar in Royal Deeside to tackle this low-key race. It covers 28 miles and travels through a very remote mountain area which is scenically spectacular with 4000' feet mountains towering above each side of the pass.

The Lairig Ghru is one of Scotland's most well known high level passes and cuts through the Cairngorm plateau. This historically provided a cattle droving route between Speyside and Deeside however, last Sunday, it provided a great route for 87 runners to travel from Braemar to Aviemore.

The first few miles from Braemar are on the road which leads to the Linn of Dee and then the route cuts off through the grounds of Mar Lodge onto estate tracks to the now derelict Derry Lodge. Weather conditions were ideal with high cloud and a cool breeze which fortunately kept the midges away.

After Derry Lodge the track gives way to a well defined path but full concentration is required as the ground is very rough underfoot. Passing below the Devil's Point (I'll let you guess the translation of this Scottish hill name!) the route becomes more remote and the 4000' peaks of Ben Macdui (Britain's 2nd highest mountain), Braerich and Cairntoul (both of which are over 4000') surround the pass. The north facing corries still held large patches of snow, again an indication of how severe the weather can be in this region. The plateau can often experience arctic like weather conditions and the highest ever wind speed in the UK was on the summit of Cairngorm when in February 1995 a gust of 170mph was recorded.

At the 18 mile mark the top of the pass and a checkpoint, manned by Aviemore mountain rescue team was reached, from here the finish could be seen but there was still a good distance to cover before we were there. However, the route does take a gentle downhill line which eventually leads in to the Rothiemercus forest. Here forest tracks lead to the road at Coylumbridge and the last mile or so is on the road into

Aviemore. The finish is in the main street opposite the Police station. Both Russ and I had good runs, finishing in 51st (in 4hrs 47 mins 9 secs) and 38th (4hrs 38 mins 50 secs) respectively; John finished in just a minute or two over 6 hrs.

81 of the 87 runners completed the race within the 6 hour time limit and the winning time was a remarkable 3hrs 10 mins 5 secs. This race, organised by Deeside runners (<http://www.deesiderunners.com>), is well worth considering if you enjoy remote, long distance races. Check their website for more details and the full race results.

David White
3rd July 2008