No Cure Only Hope –Ultra – Paul Jennings

You may turn over your paper … NOW

Q1. Write an event report in the style of your favourite fell race reporter.

Don't you just love exams? No? – it must be me then. Although I do prefer the type with a definite right or wrong answer, it's the mathematician in me. Back in my day we didn't get marking schemes so I didn't have a clue what they were looking for in the English exams. As for art exams – how on earth can you mark those, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, right?



So, what is worse than exam day? Result day surely. Especially 'A level' results day with the uncertainty of university places looming forefront in the whole family's minds. Today is 'A level' result day, I know since we've had to juggle four people who need to be in six different places at different times throughout the day (now that was a good question – we knew that I got the logistics right when no one was left standing by the roadside wondering where their lift was. Jenny just rolled her eyes when I got animated solving this problem). Yes, results day, Ruth was picking up her results in Keswick at 9am (which includes art 'A' level so we have no idea how she'll do on that one). I was starting my run at 5:30am, where would I be when her results came through? Would I have a signal at that time or would I have to wait until I met up with Jenny? I should have been able to determine this as I took the great glee in planning the assault (sorry run) as if it was a military campaign – including strict pacing at the start to ensure I didn't crash & burn later on (unlike Borrowdale, Fellside, etc …) What would I feel like if she doesn't get into her university of choice? Would it spoil the run?

5:46am Swinside Inn (OK military precision already looking very dubious) and I set off on the No Cure Always Hope Ultra 39 miles, 14,500 feet of ascent on a 13.5 hour schedule to get back to the Inn just in time for a meal at 7pm (ah – the plan is falling apart already, better get a wiggle on). To keep me on course I put Paul Johnson's No Cure run onto my watch so it would tell me if I started heading off in the wrong direction. That was the plan, but within the first ¼ mile I was to wonder "what on earth did Johnson go that way for" – for the first of many times.

Up to Causey into the mist, Sail, Crag Hill, Wandope, Whiteless Pike and then down one of the best descents in the Lakes, except today it wasn't. A wet dew on top of a firm surface would be great for a skating rink but not a fast grassy descent in shoes with knackered studs. Wham down on my backside, and again and once more, sod it I'll stay here and check on the cumulative damage and have a bit to eat. This also gave me the opportunity to look up & enjoy the blue sky and views across to leg two, it's going to be a beautiful day.

Lashing rain and thick mist greeted me as I climbed up to Red Pike & onto High Stile. Which summit – the highest of course. High Crag then Seat – I don't think I've ever been on Seat summit. Does it have a summit? There's a couple of points that might be higher than the rest of the ground. I'll scramble up to them both just to be sure, don't want to be accused of missing a summit.



Haystack – which is the summit of Haystacks? I'd better go to both just in case. Why can't they have a marshal on these summits so I know when I'm at the right one?? Now I'm on the plod over to Grey Knotts – rain still lashing, I hate the bit on the Ennerdale after Black Beck tarn even when it's good weather. Head down & plod on… Buzz buzz on the watch – text coming through… 'I've got the grades I needed'. Yippee!! I don't need to know what they are – the university place is the prize. All of a sudden it feels like I've just started out afresh. Skipping along making my own path, it feels like I'm going downhill but still gaining height - what's not to like about being out on the fells in a rain storm?

Onto Grey Knotts another one with two tops - so which is the true summit this time? The vague lump with the spot height on the OS map, or the nice outcrop of rock that I think everyone uses on the BG? Better be sure and go to both, no sign of Jenny and this is where I was due to meet her. What do I do if she is late? Should I stay or should I

go? Fortunately she appears at the stile just as I get to the top of the crag, apparently her timing leaving Keswick was a little out so it was a mad dash up from Honister. A quick top up on banana & drink, a quick chat about the results and I'm off again. Jenny thought I might call it off with this weather or I'd need a lot of moral support, but still buzzing from Ruth's results I couldn't be more fired up.

Skipping had to cease on the section up to Green Gable as the wind was absolutely wild, I was struggling to keep on my feet and walk in a straight line. The descent down Aaron Slack was horrible, wet slippery boulders or even more slippery grass. This is possibly the only time I thought – "what was Johnson doing over there" followed by "maybe he's got it right this time" (reading Paul's report afterwards he doubted his line as well). A few more tops, improving weather and a long descent to the road. A pleasant run through the fields (not the road thank you Paul) and another rendezvous with Jenny in Rosthwaite.

Onto the last section, the one with the killer bracken. "Would sir like electrocution, lethal injection or man-eating bracken?" "Man-eating bracken please!" It was a long slow agonising death – they must save this for the really bad boys. My legs were declared DoA at the top of Maiden moor, but in my mind I'd cracked it, and ultras are all in the mind right? So it was, I arrived back at Swinside Inn 13 hours 10 minutes after leaving (yes 4 minutes early), to be greeted by Philip & Jenny – Ruth was having a night on the town with her class mates, who wants to be with their knackered old man when there is partying to be had? Good on you Ruth – you deserved it!