

LAMM 2006 ASSYNT - A SETTLE HARRIERS EXPERIENCE

What a fantastic venue for the 2006 LAMM. Expectations were higher than ever for a memorable weekend, and we were not let down. Not even by the weather. Rain and cloud down to 300 m for most of the event. Real navigation skills and map interpretation of the highest order were the determining factors in any team's success.

A record number of Settle Harriers (7 pairs) all travelled up to Sutherland on Friday and made camp at the head of Loch Assynt. Food and Fuel was taken on and the first round of packing the event rucksack was undertaken, followed by an hour's sleep before the 5.00am bagpipe reveille called the campers to action stations.

I forgot to pack my plastic spoon before boarding the coach for the 10 minute drive to the start of the A and B Course. The bus driver was so sympathetic to what we were about to endure for the next two days that he gave me his 1.5Kg metal coffee spoon as a parting gift. Gary and I made an unusually good start in finding the first CP. The next one was 12 km away with at least 4 route choices. We made our choice based on all the relevant factors and set off. Within the next 3 km we changed our course at least 5 times until we had run past all the points of no return and found ourselves committed to a direct assault on the headwall of Ben Mor Assynt, 500m of vertical ridge, mossy gullies and hanging boulders. As the altimeter indicated the approaching summit, the rock and turf seemed to slightly overhang as one leaned out to peer down at what had clearly become a fully committed route where a down climb was virtually unthinkable. We avoided getting drawn into any gullies and finally topped out on to a knife edge ridge between Conival and Ben Mor Assynt. A compass bearing off the summit cairn allowed us to find the next CP where our mates, Pete and James, appeared out of the mist wondering why we looked so pale and shaken. No such drama on their route!

The course now started to accelerate and things were going well – until the CP 5 kite was obscured by some arse sitting on it for 10 minutes to read his map! Meanwhile we spent 15 minutes scouring the featureless re-entrant looking for it to no avail. I used up all my remaining energy in a seething tantrum of rage and promptly bonked. On reaching the summit of the Stack of Glencoul I could not go on. Gary did the honourable thing and carried my rucksack on his chest as we made the headlong descent towards the finish. At this point the official event photographer jumped out to record my humiliation for the web site. I was handed back my sack just before the finish line to enter the camp with a little dignity still intact.

As is usual, friends JM and AP had completed the A Course and bagged the best seafront pitch for their tent. Surprisingly, we were the first of the Settle B class to arrive. The campsite at the head of Loch Glencoul was spectacular. The evening was spent chatting about all the "if only" moments the day had presented along with plenty of feeding and drinking (except in Oz's tent where tales of starvation and abuse were reported). At about 11.00pm two otters were sighted just off the beach. This was the highlight of a day of amazing wildlife encounters which included everything from millions of froglets to herds of red deer.

The overnight results showed

A Class JM and AP 4th

B Class AH and GA - 13th, PS and JS - 30th, Oz and SM - 46th, BK and MH - 52nd, JW and AC - 78th

C Class MM and JP - 68th

Dawn arrived not a minute too soon for my tortured back after a night of world class snoring from a neighbouring tent. Gary and I had a leisurely breakfast as we were due to be last pair out of camp on the chasing start list. Unfortunately we ran out of gas for a final brew. We had fallen victim to entertaining Murf (and his bucket sized piss pot of a coffee mug) the previous evening. We left the beach at -2m below MSL for a chase through the field in an attempt to catch the only Veteran Pair ahead of us (Jon Broxap and mate). We made a steady start up the first climb knowing that some major climbs were still to come. We lost 9 mins finding the first CP in swirling cloud but eventually got to grips with the scale and timings across the route. Beinn Leoid was topped without too much distress, so now was the time to "push the boat out" and "give it some pastie". All the Settle teams formed up on a climb to a rocky knoll where a formation bonk ensued with varying degrees of pandemonium. Unfortunately it was only one member of each team that was struck down. As usual I was that member. I had to get some real food down me, but all I had was the cheese roll I made on Thursday night before leaving home. I forced it down without a drink over about 15 mins until in desperation I scooped up some stagnant water out of a muddy footprint in a bog. It seemed to do the trick.

With two CPs to go we caught up with Jon Broxap looking for a way down from the final loch. This was a fatal moment causing me to get over-excited and lose the plot. I claimed local knowledge from last year's holiday in this very area. I started spouting spurious advice without reading the map properly. I led Gary on a wasted 10min run around before he finally overruled me and got us back on line. This was to cost us at least 4 places in the final standings. We came out of the cloud to see only a mercifully short run to the finish. The first milky sunshine began to filter through as we lay on the grass to eat a well earned hot meal and cheer our fellow team mates home.

A Class: AP and JM had to settle for 3rd place after being out sprinted by "pursuers / followers" to the line - only 8 seconds adrift.

B Class: GA and AH - 10th overall and 2nd Vets, PS and JS - 24th overall, JO and SM 36th overall, BK and MH 41st overall, JW and AC 71st overall.

In the C class, day two was described as disproportionately long and arduous by the organiser. However MM and JP picked up 16 places to finish 55th overall. All teams made good gains on day two - Brian and Mick clawing back an impressive 19 places. Value for money chasers Jan and Annie milked a full 16 hours plus out of the two days. The rest of the day was spent sight seeing and enjoying the fantastic seafood at the Kylesku Hotel. The evening developed into a demonstration of the prodigious drinking capacity of the Quarrymen. All of them were declared to be technically still alive next morning- but only by a majority verdict.

It was probably the best LAMM yet.

Andrew Hinde