

Fell running

The Munros run in under 24 hours

Geoff Harrold

SURREY is not the place to find fell runners. A sweeping generalisation proven entirely wrong by Chris Dodd. Last July, Chris set out with training companion Howard Artiss, to run the 4000ft Scottish Munros, a distance of 84 miles and an accumulated ascent of 17,000ft in under 24 hours.

Christopher Dodd, while living in Surrey graduated into fell running via the Long Distance Walking Association. He found that walking all the classic hikes was part of a natural progression to running. The distance to be covered was eventually done as fast as possible, until one day he tried to *run* the course. At this time he was wearing heavy boots.

Later Chris purchased a pair of leather ripples and running began in earnest. Fell racing came next, joining Dark Peak Fell Runners Club and commuting north every two weeks.

In 1977, Chris achieved 42 peaks, in the Bob Graham Round and during the 1978 summer competed regularly in the 'A' category fell races. At the end of the '78 season, he ran 2:59 for his first marathon in the Masters and Maidens run at Guildford.

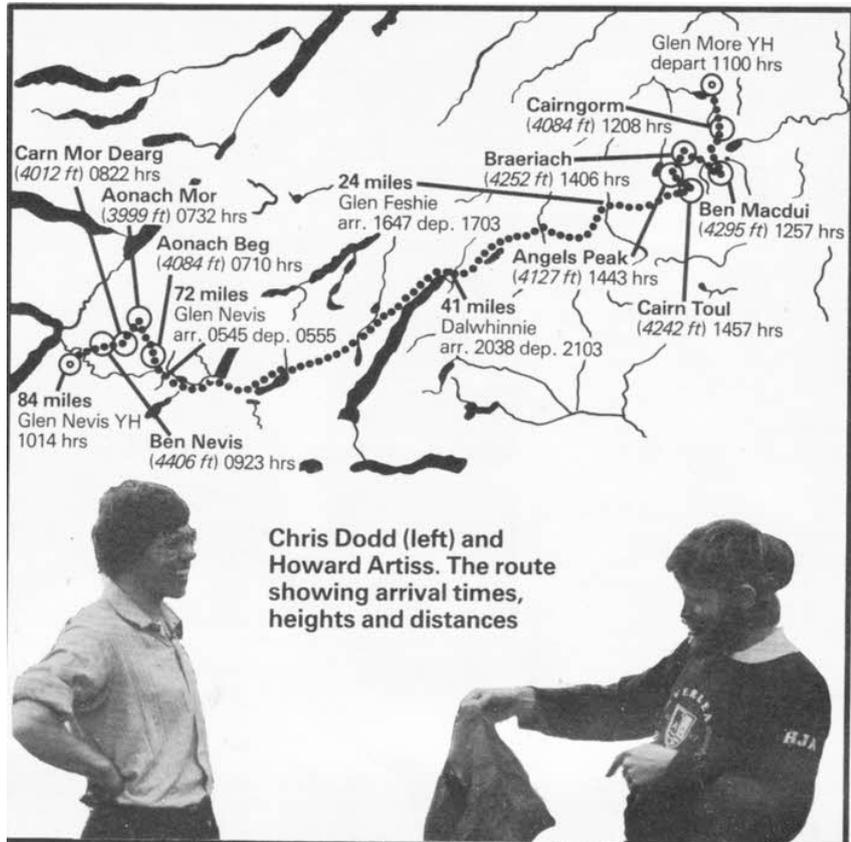
By 1979 his work as administration manager in the overseas division of OSL took him to Broxbourne in Hertfordshire, and he joined Verlea AC where he met Howard Artiss. It was about this time that he began to conceive his ambition to run the Munros.

THE BACKGROUND

The Munros are separate mountains of over 3000 ft, listed by Sir H.T. Munro in his tables. Munro's 'A' list contains four over 4000 situated in the Cairngorms and four in the Lochaber area. In a 'B' list, are a further five tops of 4000ft but they are only summits and do not count as separate Munros or mountains. They are all in the Cairngorms.

The Rucksack Club grouped the Munros together as a long distance walk in 1954 and Stan Bradshaw revived it in 1967. In 1979, Alan Heaton of the Rucksack Club and Clayton-le-Moors Harriers attempted to run them.

The walk had taken 48 hours and Chris Dodd decided that he would try to run them in 24 hours, a target hit on independently but not unnaturally by Alan Heaton. In his early 50's Heaton is a fell runner with many seasons behind him. In 1960 he was instrumental in reviving the



Just before 11 a.m., Glen More. Confident but some nerves being felt

Bob Graham Round, which had not been run since Graham himself in 1932.

Heaton's 1979 attempt on the Munros was a solo effort but foundered when he and one of his pacers made a navigational error and came off Ben Macdui in the wrong place.

Chris Dodd, meanwhile had discussed the venture at the Verlea Club, in Welwyn Garden City, and Howard Artiss became as enthusiastic as Chris.

THE TEAM

Howard had been a middle distance runner in the late sixties, usually running the steeplechase on the track, who had been drawn into long and ultra distance races in the early seventies. Gradually fell running came more and more into his summer season until in the spring of 1979 he gave up his job and 'took to the hills'. He competed all through the summer and spent periods of up to three weeks at a time camping in the fells. The theory of natural selection made him the obvious choice for Chris' partner.

Chris had decided to take a partner as an insurance policy, for although the pace would be that of the slowest, one could go on if the other became injured. Chris was determined that one of the pair would succeed and so, he felt, not let down the pacers, who would otherwise have spent an expensive three days to no purpose.

The back-up team were to be Martin Stone, Peter Simpson and Frank Thomas, all from the Dark Peak Fell Runners Club. Later in the year, from the 29th to 31st August, Peter and Frank completed Wainwright's Coast to Coast run, connecting St Bees Head and Robin Hood's Bay, a distance of 190 miles, in a new record of 51 hours and 10 minutes.

Chris and Howard got news that Alan Heaton was going to make another attempt and it was with some anxiety that they waited for June 14. That day brought some of the worst summer gales for years. Heaton was buffeted from start to finish but stuck guttily to his task, covering the course in 26 hours 5 minutes. Chris and Howard breathed again but were convinced that given favourable conditions, Heaton would have broken 24 hours.

With the record still there to be taken, the Verlea duo surveyed the course at the end of June. They backpacked the route they had chosen. Starting from the Norwegian Stone outside the youth hostel in Glen More and ending 'for the sake of completeness' at the youth hostel in Glen Nevis rather than the start/finish field of the Ben Nevis race. They took compass bearings to and from the peaks and carefully plotted the approaches for the support car.

They had decided to include Aonach Mor, a peak of 3999ft in the Lochaber area in case the Ordnance Survey later upgraded its height and because the summit cairn is well over one foot high. Out of the five 'tops' in list 'B' of the Munro tables, Chris considered that Angels Peak in the Cairngorms merited attention and was a Munro in all but name.



Stop for Food, Peter Simpson on the left



The inevitable 'butties' and 'lorry loads' of Complian

This made nine peaks to be covered. During this period, Howard's training became hampered by a cold and a foot injury. In his build-up Chris had done his basic training of 50 to 55 miles a week in the woods around Broxbourne' and at Welwyn, with frequent visits to the North for fell races.

THE ATTEMPT

All preparations complete, they set out for Scotland on Friday 18th July and camped in Glen More overnight, waking next morning at seven to a perfect day. The start time was fixed for 11 a.m. but by then the clear blue sky had darkened and ominous clouds glowered down as they set off with Frank pacing. The 11 a.m. start was chosen so that the mountainous parts of the run would be covered in daylight.

Franks stint ended by the chairlift at Martin Stone like the others unfamiliar with

Cairngorm. However, so well had Chris and Howard prepared and surveyed the route that navigation proved no problem.

The first ascent and descent over, Martin and the two southerners came next to Ben Macdui, the highest peak in that section at 4295ft, and from there down into the Lairig Ghru where they had their first snack. That over they turned their attention to Braerich, arriving at the summit at just after two in the afternoon.

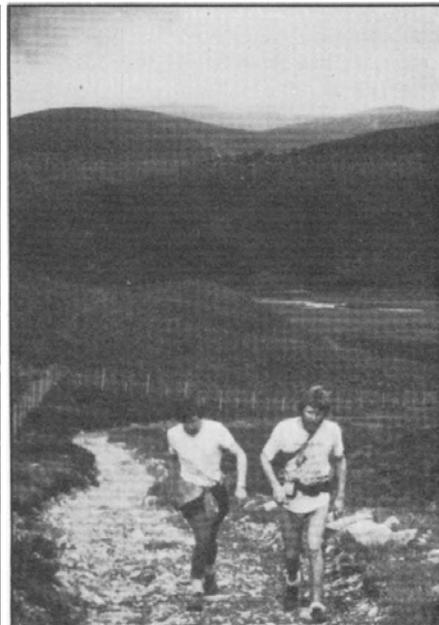
Pausing for some photographs,-they swung on to ascend Angels Peak followed by Cain Toul which completed the Cairngorm peaks. Descending, the party ran along a good track to Glen Feshie, where at 4.47 p.m. and after 24 miles, they met Frank Thomas and Peter Simpson with food and drink. Despite the occasional shower they had completed the first section well under schedule and celebrated with enormous amounts of Complian, Marmite, rice, fruit, 'butties' and cake.

Celebration over, they- set off up the Glen with Peter Simpson. The next section to Dalwinnie via Lochan an-t Sluic, Bhran Cottage and Loch Cuaich was about 17 miles and would bring them roughly to the halfway point at just after 8.30. The runners set off along a series of tracks for eight miles before stopping to take some cake and orange juice. Then pressing on, the trio ran into their first boggy section as they came up to a loch. Soon, however, they found a firm track and reached Dalwinnie well inside schedule.

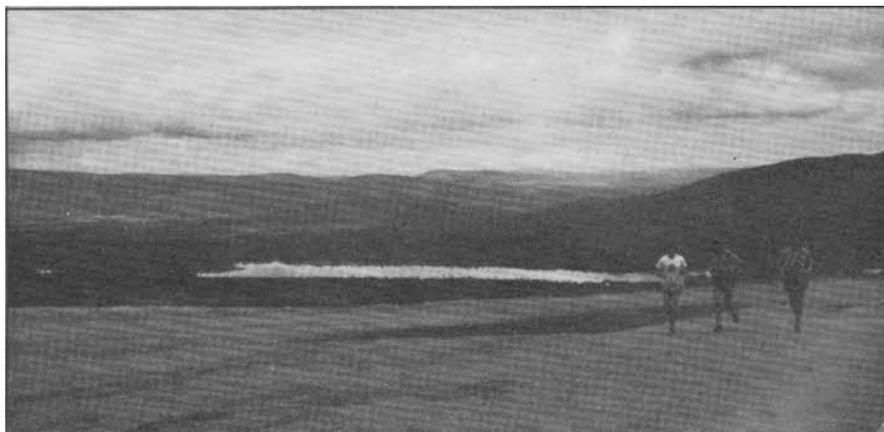
Up to this point Chris had been experiencing a nervous stomach, while Howard had been his usual cheerful self. Having reached halfway in good time, Chris' nerves vanished and he began to go well. However, the injury to Howard's foot began to bruise and his lack of training made itself felt.



Early days, Chris and Howard feeling frisky



The day wears on and the legs get heavy



Above: With Frank Thomas as night falls. Below: The summit Kiln on Ben Nevis



But at the halfway point, things still looked good and they feasted well on soup, stew and the inevitable 'butties'. Chris with his nervous stomach, consumed 'lorry loads' of Complian. Twenty-five minutes was the time it took to do justice to Martin's cooking and they set off at nine along the side of Loch Ericht paced by Frank Thomas.

THE LAST LAP

The miles passed easily as night fell until it was completely black and the trio were running by the light of their hand torches. Howard had the misfortune to take an involuntary swim at the fording of one stream but his torch shone bravely out from under water and he made the bank, shook himself like a dog and they continued.

Both Howard and Chris were experienced at night running with torches, but it had its hazards as Was proved when Frank Thomas mistook a stream for a path. The paths themselves continually meandered into streams.

This section of 31 miles took them past Ben Alder Lodge, Culra Lodge, over Ben Alder Col at about midnight, along Loch Ossan — east end to west end taking $\frac{3}{4}$ hour—past the southwest corner of Loch Treig, past Luibeilt and on to the head of Glen Nevis, where Peter and Martin were waiting, shivering in their tent.

As all five sheltered in the tent, it became apparent that a decision would have to be made. Howard's foot problems now made it doubtful that he could continue at the required pace. Chris recalls that he experienced a wave of emotion when Howard asked him to go on alone.

He and Howard had planned for months, set the whole adventure up with careful planning and had come through together to within 12 miles of their goal. Against that, 24 hours was a possibility and Martin had contacted the local press who would be waiting at the finish. The three helpers were almost as much a part of the venture as Howard and Chris and not to finish would let them down.

So the decision was made, and Chris reluctantly left Howard behind to follow later with Frank, while he and Peter Simpson set off to cover the last peaks. The time was 5.55 a.m., just 5 hours left.

Despite a gusting wind, the peaks were covered in good time and Ben Nevis was surmounted at 9.23 a.m., leaving just over 1½ hours to beat the record. The descent to the Youth hostel was uneventful, apart from Chris stubbing his toe half a dozen times, and was accomplished in 45 minutes. The arrival was one of mixed feelings as Chris saw Howard amongst the people near the hostel. He had started out but after $\frac{1}{4}$ mile decided not to risk further injury. The partnership had been broken on the last lap.

Chris Dodd's finishing time was 23 hours 14 minutes. His target next summer will be another crack at the Bob Graham Round with a goal of 60 peaks to aim for. He recently paced Ann Sayer in the early stages of her successful Lands End to John O'Groats record bid. In the mean time he plans to build up his reserves by racing cross country with Verlea AC.



Nearly there, Chris and Peter at the foot of Ben Nevis



Chris checks his time and does not worry about the house-full sign