

# THE 2010 Yorkshire

These Yorkshire championships are the oldest county championships in the world of fell running, with the senior men's now in their 33rd year, the ladies' are in their 17th year and the juniors are 15 years old. Many thanks go to Burton Safes Ltd., Up & Running and The Wharfedale Clinic in Otley for their loyalty and generous support over the years.

## No Gray day for Karl!

On what was a grey day weather wise for most, with intermittent rain, gale force winds blowing and mist swirling on the high tops of Black Hill, veteran Karl Gray brought some Yorkshire sunshine by winning his first ever English championship race. He showed true Yorkshire grit to fend off any challenges and his victory was made even sweeter by him winning the coveted Yorkshire title which was incorporated into the Holme Moss race. Karl had been chasing the elusive Yorkshire gold medal and championship trophy for the past five years, and his medal tally had been three bronze (2004, 2006 & 2008) and two silver medals (2005 & 2009). Now his campaign has been richly rewarded with the golden shiney one. Karl's day just got better and better, because besides taking more than a massive 25 minutes off the course record, he also led his club Calder Valley Fell Runners to team gold medals for the second year running with Gavin Mulholland and Adam Breaks. Individual Yorkshire silver went to last years bronze medallist Graham Pearce who this year has become a true English and British contender in fell running and was justly rewarded with his first England vest for the Mount Snowdon international, while the bronze medal went to previous Holme Moss winner Chris Birchall.

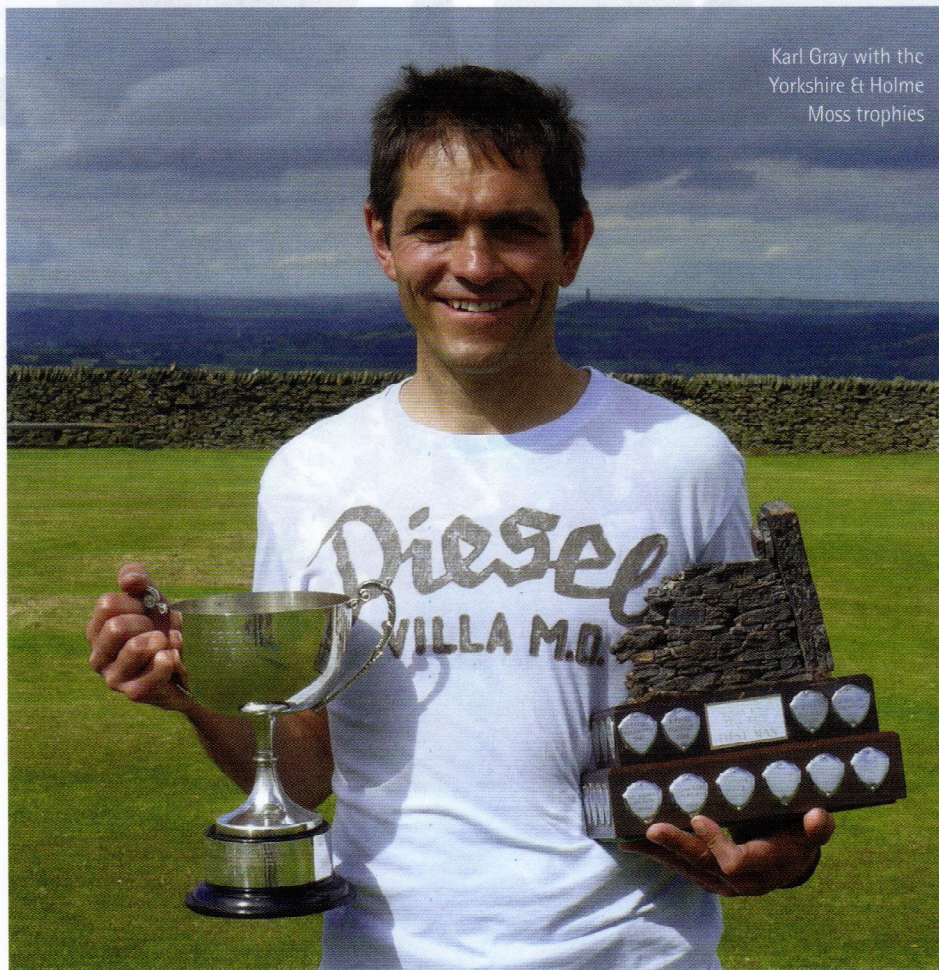
It was all change with new names collecting the ladies medals, veteran Aly 'Alison' Raw was a really 'chuffed' ladies winner, while the silver medal went to Helen Berry of Holmfirth Harriers, who not only raced but helped with the results, as her club were the race organisers. Pippa Wilkie of Dark Peak Fell Runners took the bronze, and with Nicky Spinks and Lyn Bland, the ladies of Dark Peak lifted the team gold medals, to equal the men who have only won it once way back in 1990.



Lyn Bland, Pippa Wilkie and Nicky Spinks of Dark Peak lift the team gold

## Karl Gray of Calder Valley Fell Runners

YORKSHIRE FELS CHAMPION, ENGLISH V40 BRONZE MEDALLIST AND BRITISH V40 JOINT SILVER MEDALLIST



Karl Gray with the Yorkshire & Holme Moss trophies

Photos © Dave Woodhead www.woodentops.org.uk

Lying on the hospital bed just having come around from the anaesthetic I was given the news that not only had I had a large tear of my lateral meniscus, but I'd also suffered a large chondral defect of my lateral femoral condyle.

To say the least this was a bit of a low point and a surprise as the month before the operation had been a great month for me and the club. Apart from a slight bit of knee ache from time to time I hadn't suffered any knee pain for months.

The team had a solid performance at the Ian Hodgson relay followed by a Bronze medal at the British relays. I then managed to get on the podium of the OMM Elite with now club team mate James Logue. The week after I was amazed to get a silver medal at the Yorkshire

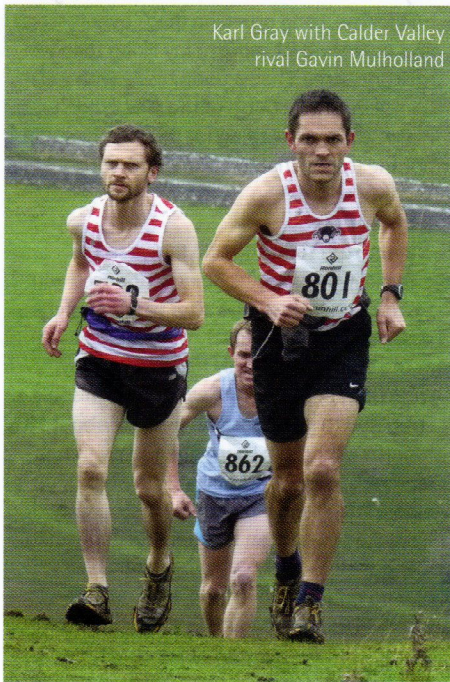
championships and team Gold with club mates Ben Mounsey and the ever improving Gav Mulholland. I'd previously returned to racing in the summer at Dentedale and performed very well considering that all my training had been on the road bike with just a couple of hill rep sessions.

Within a few minutes of being given the bad news about my knee I was beginning to look at the positives. The defect had now been stabilised and it was half the depth of my articular cartilage and not down to the bone.

The procedure that had been performed to aid repair of the defect is called 'microfracture'. This involves drilling tiny holes into the bone underlying the defect causing bleeding and the

# championships

Photo © Eileen Woodhead www.woodentops.org.uk



Karl Gray with Calder Valley rival Gavin Mulholland

formation of a super clot (hopefully) full of stem cells which then grows into cartilage and fills in the defect.

Being a physiotherapist I was fully aware of the implications of this. Firstly it is far from guaranteed that this would resolve my symptoms. Also the procedure may not create enough cartilage to fill in the defect and if it did the type of cartilage which forms is fibrous cartilage which is not as smooth or as robust as normal articular (Hyaline) cartilage. I'd planned to give the V40 championship a good go in 2010 and now I was worried if I would be able to run competitively again. I decided to just see how my recovery went and if my knee wasn't up to running then so be it.

## The cause

The injury must have occurred while I was out cycling the week after the Three Peaks race when the World Long race championships were there. I had been hitting every red traffic light which meant repeatedly clipping out of my new pedals. The pedals had been a bit too tight to unclip from and the repeated force of twisting my foot out of the pedal had injured my knee.

I didn't notice any problems until later that evening when my knee started to twinge when I was walking. This gradually got worse over the next few days and I was struggling walking up and down stairs. I suspected that I had torn my meniscus at the time and decided to seek a surgical opinion. My symptoms gradually improved though and ironically, long before I could run again, I found I could cycle without any discomfort. I did however slacken my pedals right off and learned to track stand better!

My knee steadily improved and I managed to get back running about six weeks later without any adverse reaction. A subsequent consultation and MRI scan were clear which did surprise me due to the symptoms I had had. I therefore decided to just continue as normal and wait and see if they recurred. Just over a year later my symptoms did recur, without suffering any sort of twist or injury to my knee. I decided to seek the opinion of another orthopaedic surgeon. By the time I saw him my symptoms had again settled down and I was back running and racing without any problems other than an occasional ache. The consultant agreed that I probably had a meniscal tear and arranged for the surgery.

Following the surgery the Consultant had recommended no running for at least 3 months so I left it 4 months. After the operation I was supposed to be non-weight bearing for 2 weeks so I didn't weight bear for nearly 3 weeks to give the clot ample time to take hold.

## The come back trail

I was already planning my rehab and how to train in the future to prolong the life of my knee. The type of injury I'd sustained meant that the days of me going out and doing long training runs were long gone.

I already knew from my training in the summer and from my academic studies that cycling was an excellent way of cross-training for mountain running with very good strengthening and cardiovascular returns. I'd have to get my endurance on the bike and keep the impact of running down to a minimum, meaning shorter more intense sessions. Once I was given the go ahead I began my cycling. Gentle at first, light gears, no big hills and staying in the saddle. Gradually through the snow and ice of January and February I built up my mileage and resistance. God was it cold!

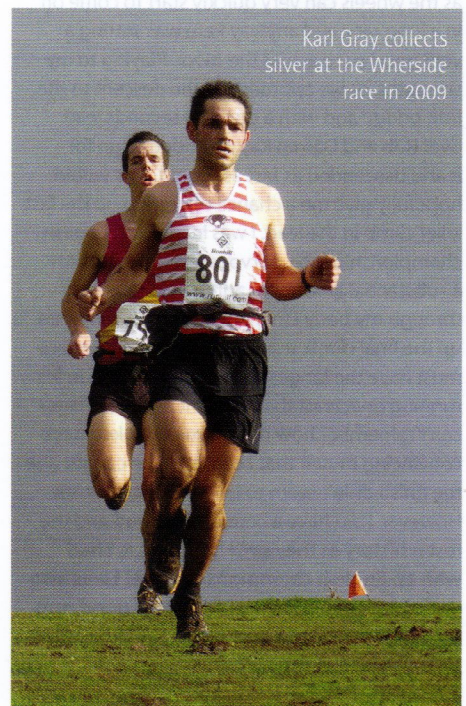
I'd planned my return to be at Coniston, not an ideal comeback race given the terrain, however I needed to do it if I was going to go for the English as well as the British championship. My preparation race for that turned out to be a Bunny Run. Now most people who have had the pleasure of running these races know how fast and furious they are. I had done no flat running or any speedwork so was amazed that I'd finished second in a very respectable time.

I'd started running again at the start of April and this coincided with the birth of my second daughter Erin on the 31st March. Having a four year old as well, certainly focuses your training. You don't waste any available time or opportunities! There is a little hidden valley a five minute jog from where I live that Steve Oldfield and I use regularly to train in. This valley has constituted my running/hill rep training for the last five months. I could nip out

and do a hill rep session and be back home in 45-60 minutes depending on how many reps I'd done. Hill reps has been the sum total of my running training over the last five months. It offers minimal impact running up (and I take it steady running down reducing impact and using it for recovery) improves my leg strength and is a great cardiovascular interval session. Three sessions of this a week coupled with averaging a hundred and fifty hilly miles per week on the bike got me back to my previous level of fitness. When I returned to racing, I found my knee didn't suffer any reactions and I was in good competitive shape considering how little actual running I was doing.

## The race

So where did me winning a Championship race come from I hear you say, especially with the constraints and limitations of my injury and subsequent rehab. The truth of the matter is I don't really know. I have had some of my best results in longer races: record holder for the Wadsworth Trog otherwise known as 'The Beast', sub 3 hours for the 3 peaks and several top 10 places in long Championship races. However, to win a Championship race is something else. I came into the race with no great expectations, I just wanted to consolidate and strengthen my V40 position. I hadn't ran anything like this distance in approximately 9 months and my longest training run to date was a 9 mile recce of part of the course. I didn't know how my knee or body would fair. The steady start really suited me as I was able to stay with the front group as we got into the thick of the race. This was



Karl Gray collects silver at the Wherside race in 2009

Photo © Eileen Woodhead www.woodentops.org.uk



Karl Gray negotiating the rocks at Pen Y Ghent

where I knew from past experience that I tend to get stronger. Surprised that Rob Hope and Lloyd Taggart hadn't pulled away on reaching Laddow rocks gave me a good bit of confidence. Previously I had been concentrating on beating Graham Pearce for the Yorkshire champs gold, I now sensed however I was in with a chance of getting a top five finish. Feeling good running up to Black Hill I was soon past Lloyd and sitting on the shoulder of Rob. With Pete Vale approximately ten metres ahead I was wondering why nobody was closing the gap so I pushed on and by the transmitter Pete and I had a 10-15 second lead. I felt good, but didn't want to push too hard yet as the wheels can very quickly start to come off in a long race and anyway Pete was setting a very good pace across the moor. Playing to my strengths, as we approached the descent to the iron bridge and with a good 30 seconds lead over Rob and Darren Kay, I decided to go for it and descended as fast as I could. This would hopefully give me a chance of getting up the last killer climb in the lead. I was leading an English championship race, nervous, excited and with a substantial amount of adrenaline pumping through my body I managed to extend my lead up the final climb. It has to be said that this race must have the longest and cruellest finish in fell running or at least that's what it felt like to me. I can't remember how many times I looked back convincing myself that I could still be caught and the finish didn't seem to be getting any closer. However, I did have a comfortable lead and the rest is history as they say, I had done it, I had won an English championship race! I was also Yorkshire champion and with very good runs by Gav Mullholland and Adam Breaks, Calder Valley retained the Yorkshire team gold. What a fantastic day!!

## Aly Raw of Bingley Harriers

LADIES YORKSHIRE FELLS CHAMPION & ENGLISH FV45 SILVER MEDALLIST AND BRITISH V40 SILVER MEDALLIST

Dave is always questioning my Yorkshire pedigree. This may be because I am forced, through work as a teacher to live in exile just over the border into County Durham. However, with a Granny who was born and grew up on a farm underneath what is now Scar House Reservoir at the head of Nidderdale; a mother who was, reputedly, the first woman to wear trousers in Hove Edge and a father who is very reluctant to sleep outside the county, I am hoping to dispel his doubts. I am proper Yorkshire through to the core.

So, it was with a mixture of thrilled surprise and embarrassment that I won the Yorkshire Fell Running title this year at the Holme Moss race. To me it is a unique and special title, of which I am very proud and that I could never have imagined winning. I am acutely aware, however, that someone of my age and calibre should not be adding their name to the trophy. And, of course, there are stacks of Yorkshire lasses miles better than me. But with such a packed fell running calendar there is always going to be the demands of other events and different running priorities and commitments.

You can only beat those who turn up on the day after all. The Holme Moss race was a good one for me. Long gruelling drags over tussock and peat I find far more to my liking than wet rock and scree. I had a good tussle with Helen (Berry) over the course of the race. I didn't realise we were battling for the Yorkshire title nor the trophy that her Dad, Norman, donated.

### A bleak time

Winning the Yorkshire title this year was especially meaningful. Being diagnosed with thyroid cancer just days after witnessing the passing away of my lovely Mum, Josephine, at the end of 2008 really halted me in my tracks. Suddenly my life was unrecognisable. I struggled to get it back on track for about 18 months. Although I continued to try to run (and race), stupidly thinking I would pick up where I had left off before my first surgery, I half joked that when they removed my thyroid gland they took my *Oomph* out as well. I had no 'go' in me for a long, long time and lost the belief that it would ever return. The journey has been long, hard and, at times, a



Aly Raw at Blackstone Edge



Yorkshire champion Alison Raw receives her prizes from co-ordinator Dave Woodhead

bit bleak – physically but as much mentally and emotionally. A very good running friend taught me just to get back out there, when the time was right, run for myself and simply enjoy it. And when I stopped worrying about where I came in a race I started to run a bit better again. I am loving it more than ever and when I think back to the place I was a year ago the Yorkshire title has affirmed how far I have come.

My first experience of fell running was going up to watch the Three Peaks with my Dad, Doug. My Dad was so impressed that women could actually compete in such a demanding event I vowed, secretly, that one day I would do it. It was almost 20 years into the future before I actually succeeded. I got into running when I lived in York tooting around the roads and training on the Knavesmire. It wasn't until I returned to live in Sedbergh (I had lived there before it was taken from Yorkshire into Cumbria) that I took to running on the fells a bit. That was until I was persuaded to do the Tebay Fell Race where I came about third from last. I couldn't believe the last climb – it was so steep I could see right up the shorts of the bloke in front! After that experience (the demanding nature of the sport rather than the view up the bloke's shorts!) I threw away a perfectly good pair of walshes and thought that fell running was not for me.

#### Got the bite back

It was a few years later I fell back into fell racing. Darlington hasn't got a massive fell running scene. I did discover the summer evening race series on the North York Moors and started going along. They were a really good introduction to the discipline and led me to other local fell races in the Cheviots and Weardale. I got 'bitten' and first did the championships in 2003. I was shocked when I went to Ireland to do the Slieve Bearnagh race the first time. I couldn't believe you could get so much quality mountain experience in a race of less than 4 miles. I thought the organiser was demonstrating his Irish humour and I laughed when he announced at the start that the wall tops were out of bounds. Half way round I realised he wasn't



Aly Raw at 2010 3 Peaks

joking. The wall tops would've been the easiest running. I returned to Northern Ireland in 2006 to do the Mourne Mountain Marathon and had one of the best weekends ever. Absolutely glorious.

My favourite fell race has to be Sedbergh Hills – or indeed any race on the Howgill Fells. I love those hills and they are equally beautiful in bright spring green, vibrant summer brown or sparkling in the winter sunshine under a covering of snow. I always enjoy the Simonside Fell races in the Cheviot Hills and the Three Peaks, of course.

I eat most things with relish. I especially like bread with lots of unsalted butter and oatcakes with Wensleydale cheese and chutney. I have a very sweet tooth too so chocolate and flapjacks feature and lots of fruit and vegetables of course – I try to eat as many colours in a day as I can.

When I'm home I like to listen to music and the radio. I have no television but a music machine in every room of the house. My soundtrack for this summer has been a fantastic album by The XX, and great albums by Elbow, Band of Horses and Doves. No doubt this will change as we move into autumn... During last year I rediscovered the art of knitting and produced four jumpers in no time. I'm wondering whether there might be a market in knitted Bingley vests for the winter fell races! I spend a lot of time outdoors and adore camping – especially since I acquired my new companion, Stan 'Longshanks', AKA Big Paw the dog. People ask what I do with my time without a TV but to be honest I never think about it. It's been 8 years now and I don't miss it one bit. I think it's very liberating!

Here's to another good year of running and racing. And here's to Yorkshire!