



SPORTING MATTERS

BY PETER JACK

WHAT on earth does a term for friendship have to do with Prince William of Orange? It's a long story my friends but bear with me.

'Comrades' is not only a friendly greeting to a colleague but is the name of one of the world's most iconic Ultra Runs.

It's in the east of South Africa and runs from (if you'll excuse the pun) Durban to Pietermaritzburg in the province of Kwazulu-Natal.

This year, there will be over 22,000 runners from over 60 countries, some competing to break the course record of 5 hours 24 minutes for the men, six hours five minutes for the women, and some, like me, just trying to beat the cut off time of 12 hours.

The race was founded in 1921 and other than for the Second World War, it's been run every year. It has had over 300,000 finishers (and seven deaths).

The average temperature is in the mid-20s. Nice for sunbathing but not for running a stupidly long distance.

It was founded by a World War I Vet, Vic Clapham in honour of his former 'Comrades' in 1921. If you finish between 10 hours and 11 hours, you get a Clapham Medal!

That explains the first bit of the title but what about King Billy?! My main training for this race has been on the legendary Round the Bridges Circuit which is exactly 10 miles - and what is 10 miles in metric terms (as the South African race uses the metric system)?

It is 16K and 90 meters - therefore 1690 - therefore King Billy! So one circuit is one 'King Billy' and I will have to do five and a half King Billys!

So what is the distance? Like the distance of the marathon itself, it is a completely arbitrary figure. It is 89 kilometres or 55 miles and is the distance between the two cities.

Last year it was the UK's hilliest off road marathon, ie, Glencoe in Scotland for nearly seven hours of painful rocky paths...then there was the Wall Duathlon in the Mourne which included ascending Slieve Donard in the middle of the race... before that there were countless Belfast to Dublin maracycles with over 200 miles in two days; Ironman events in Europe and America...but never before have we attempted a double marathon plus.

ULTRA
One marathon is 42K, two marathons are 84K and then there is another 5K so it is definitely an Ultra. Strictly speaking, an ultra is anything more than a marathon.

I have done only one ultra in the past - that was in Connemara where I did the 63K/39 mile marathon and a half.

The scenery in Connemara is magnificent and the weather the year I did it was stunning. There was only one problem, after the marathon, the road swung round to the right and up a monster of a hill of which you couldn't even see the top!

Never has a finish line been so warmly welcomed!

I did that race beside my best buddy, Mark Kinkaid of Warrenpoint. Mark and I have been best mates since our days at Queens when a 'triathlon' might have consisted of drinking three pints in each of three different bars on the one night.

After the halcyon days of student existence and the shocking introduction of a thing called real life, Mark and I started running, then triathlon, then marathons, then Ironmen... you get the picture.

Mark was always a better swimmer and slightly quicker on the bike so I would try and chase him down on the run course in the third discipline. I did it so enthusiastically at one event in Belfast that I ended up in the back of an ambulance after the finish line.

In the last few years, rather than getting more sensible, we have been getting even stupider.

A few years ago, it was Coast to Coast from Sligo to Newcastle into a solid headwind for two days of biking, canoeing and running (before getting lost in the fog on the top of a mountain in the Mourne).

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QUALIFY
Before we even got to South Africa,

Comrades and King Billy!

however, we had to qualify. The organisers had picked the Manchester Marathon and the necessary time was sub five hours.

I had a stormer of a day and broke four. Mark, on the other hand, looked terrible as he bravely struggled through the finish line in a shade under the qualifying time.

On his safe return home, his GP referred him for an ECG and the hastily summoned cardiologist regrettably told Mark he was not going to be doing any Comrades Race.

Instead, he would be in a hospital undergoing a procedure to alter the rhythm of his heart-beat.

So what was I going to do? One of the main reasons for doing sport is the craic, the companionship and - you're ahead of me here - the comradeship.

I quickly decided that there was no way I was going to South Africa on my own without my best mate. The post-race beer wouldn't taste so good, I wouldn't have been in the trenches with my mate, I'd have been flying solo and it wouldn't have felt right.

Mark and I have been to so many start lines and finish lines together that it just wouldn't be half as much fun and I am

now at the stage where fun's more important than a quick finish time.

I reflected, what to do now? I didn't know so I went out for a run to try to clear my head and work out what to do next (having a run is a great place to solve problems) and it quickly dawned on me that I could still do a 'Comrades' style run - but where? And when?

As regards to the 'when', I went for the same weekend as the race but I am going for Saturday June 3 rather than Sunday June 4 as I want to stagger up and see the Walled City Marathon the day after my effort.

In relation to the 'where', I could run from Limavady to Glengormley but that didn't seem awfully attractive. As you know, I am a big fan of keeping it local (Best beach in the world? - Benone; Best hill in the world? - Benevenagh; Best Country Park in the world? - Roe Valley; Best festival in the world? - Stendhal; Best race in the world? - Round the Bridges).

So why not do Round the Bridges 5 times and then a wee bit - problem solved!

COMRADES - LIMAVADY STYLE
So I am going to do the 'Comrades' except it is the Limavady version. Unlike the South African original, I won't have 45 aid stations on the course.

There won't be 50 doctors and 20 nurses on the finish line (and a life support paramedic just before the finish line). My race will not be started with the tape recording of a cock's crow at dawn.

There won't be five sets of hills... Well actually yes, there would be five hills - I have to drag myself up Artikelly Brae five times!

So how on earth do you train for a distance that is either for spectacularly good athletes - or for spectacularly optimistic athletes - and I definitely fall into the latter camp?

DIFFICULT
Have you ever run a mile in 12 minutes? It's difficult. How do you go as slowly as that? (Except of course at the end of an Ironman!)

The answer, according to my philosophy, is to walk 4 minutes and then slowly jog for 8. I've already marked every mile from 1 to 10 on the course so I know exactly where I

have to be at exactly what time. I know when to start running and I know when to start walking.

I plan to run two and a half miles from the start line backwards out to the Seacoast Road past Cornfields, then back to the start line, then It's only 5 laps of 10 miles each... but those of you who have done Round the Bridges (last Thursday night in June, 700 expected this year, organised by the Springwell Running Club) know that the start line and the finish line are about 100 meters apart or in my language - 30 seconds of effort!

So I will actually do a bit more than the required distance - better too much than too little.

CUNNING PLAN
I aim to start at 8:00am and Bill has a cunning plan that sees me finishing at 7:59pm, ie, I have a whole 60 seconds to play with!

My daughter Hannah will do 4 or 5 miles with me. Her job is to keep her father sane and keep saying nonsense like, 'You're going really well... honest!'

Please see my proposed schedule. If you want to join me for a lap, you will be very welcome.

Am I looking for sponsorship for charity? No. Why would you pay your money for me to enjoy myself! But if you do want to buy my book (My Journeys Part 3) which is available at 13, Main Street for only £10:00 to help Limavady Interact Club build a well for a school in Kenya, then I will gladly autograph a copy as well!

The real Comrades Run has five cut off points. I don't have any but I am determined to get the 55 miles/89Km done before 8:00pm as I want to celebrate with a pint in Frank's before 8:30pm!

One unique aspect of the Comrades is the fact that in an odd year, ie 2017, it is run from Durban to Pietermaritzburg which is uphill. Every even year, ie, 2016

and 2018, it is run downhill, ie, Pietermaritzburg to Durban.

Believe it or not, there is only six minutes difference in the record times for each direction. I know the Bridges is mainly flat but I have discovered, after doing two laps of it in three hours 10, that not only is there Artikelly Brae but there is a hill at Myroe Corner and there is a drag up past Cornfields and also before Craig's Service Station - it may not seem like much but on my fourth or fifth lap, it will seem like a mini Everest!

Rather than running in the world's largest and oldest Ultra Marathon, with a cast of teeming thousands, exchanging pleasantries with runners of all different nationalities, I will be running Round the Bridges not once, not twice, not three times, not four times, but five and half times, spending much of the time muttering to myself about why oh why am I out here... then I will think of my mate Mark and I know I will find a reason to finish.

It won't be pretty but I will get it done. I will bring it home. I will make it to that finish line.

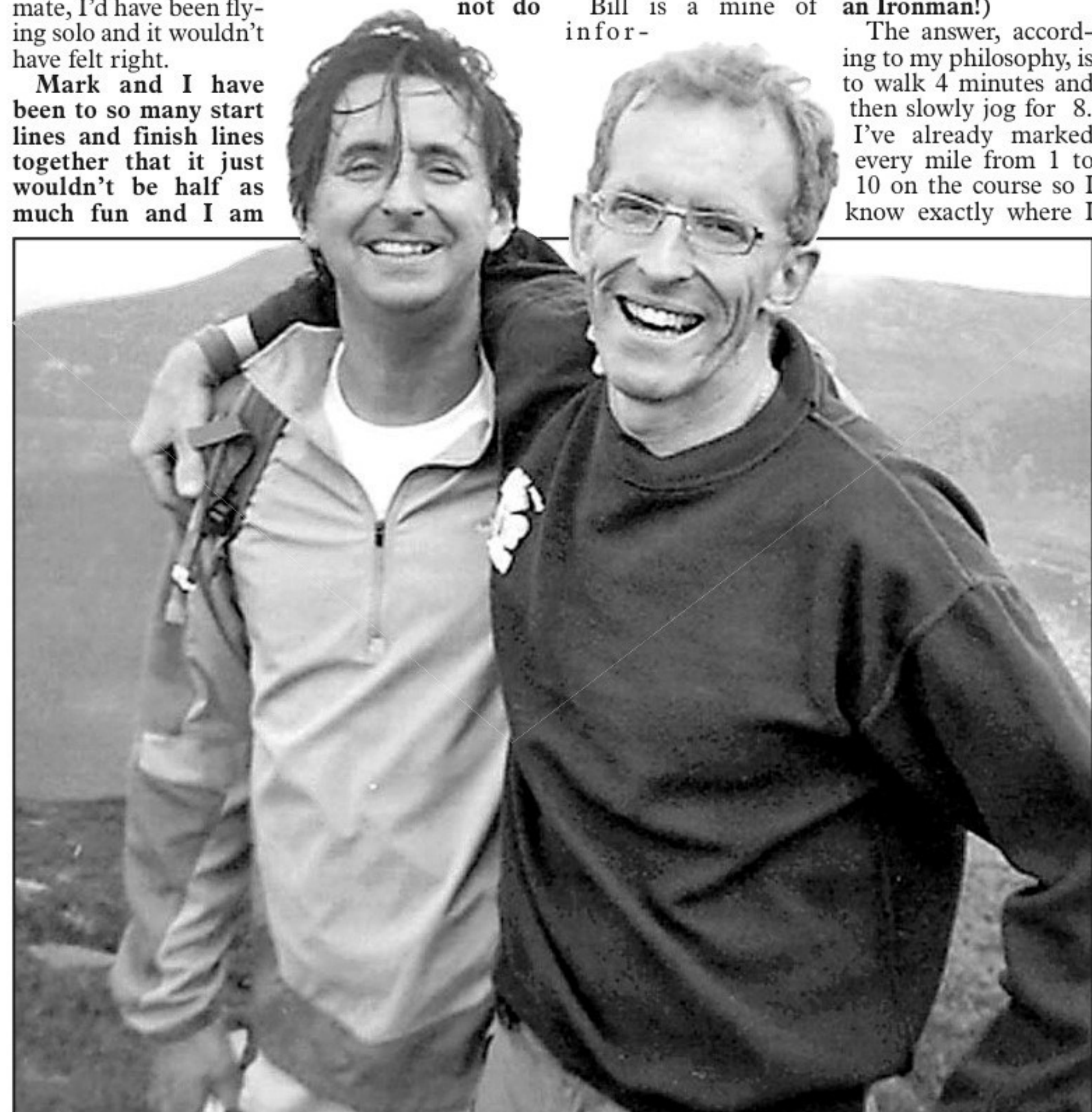
The spirit of Comrades, according to the originators nearly a century ago, is apparently summed up by 'Comradery, selflessness, dedication, perseverance and ubuntu'. Ubuntu apparently means 'the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity'.

I will be trying to work on my ubuntu at about mile 46 - maybe see you there?

DATE, TIME AND SCHEDULE
The Comrades - Limavady version comprising of 55 miles/89km on the Round the Bridges circuit will take place on Saturday June 3 commencing at 8.00am.

The start and finish line will be The Recreation Club, Killane Road, Limavady.

Scheduled Time	Mile	Actual Time
Start 8.00am	2.5 miles out/ 2.5 miles back	8.00 am
Lap 1 9.00am	6-15	
Lap 2 11.00am	16-25	
Lap 3 1.10pm	26-35	
Lap 4 3.10pm	36-45	
Lap 5 5.30pm	46-55	
Finish Line 7.59pm	Phew!	
Owens? 8.00pm		



Comrades in arms - Peter Jack and Mark Kinkaid. NCL21-27s

Come and join Peter Jack for a very slow lap!