



Country diary

The trials of life

The Lake District

A Harry Griffin
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Next Saturday in Borrowdale 50 years of running up and down Lake District mountains will be celebrated by a crowd of extremely fit men and women. Men have been running up and down fells at Grasmere and other places for more than 100 years, but these races only last 20 minutes or so and competitors run for money. The mountain trials whose jubilee is celebrated this weekend last for several hours, cover many miles over the roughest fells and the competitors run for just a certificate - and the fierce joy of testing themselves against the mountains and the elements.

At first, the races were run over a fixed course - Bowfell, Esk Pike, Scafell Pike, Great Gable, Esk Hause and Rossett Gill - and many competitors ran in heavy mountaineering boots. But since 1957 the course has been secret, and competitors have had to run through a series of checkpoints, indicated by map references. Indeed, these races to map references started years before the new sport of orienteering reached this country. The courses have also become longer and more demanding with competitors forced to make intelligent choices of the best route between checkpoints.

Very often conditions have been appalling, with skilled runners and mountaineers unable to complete the course. In 1962 when the event was run from Glenridding in incessant, driving rain and thick cloud, only one man out of scores of entrants, George Brass of Clitheroe, finished. All the rest, drenched through and frozen stiff, retired. Quite exceptional people these trial runners. One of them, the legendary Joss Naylor, has won no fewer than 10 trials but still turns out every year.

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