

## SAUNDERS MOUNTAIN MARATHON 2023 ~ Harter Fell Class ~ First Vets

I set out on Day 1 of The Saunders Mountain Marathon with a degree of trepidation. With a combined age of 137 years, I wasn't 100% certain, that reaching the finish line on Day 2 was even attainable!



Carol (McNeil), my partner, immersed herself into this two day event with the most incredible perseverance and stoicism, I have ever witnessed in a woman of 79 years!

She had asked me if I would run with her, soon after losing my husband to cancer last winter. Andy, had always loved The Saunders, winning the Scafell Class on three separate occasions during the 80's with three different partners. It is with some regret that he and I never ran it together, before his knees finally "gave in"!

Both Carol and I had a good degree of local knowledge. I have lived in Coniston for 36 years and Carol taught at John Ruskin School for over 12 years. Between the two of us, navigation was not an issue and Carol of course has won a gold medal four times in the World Orienteering Championships.

Being early July, I had grave concerns that heat and dehydration might be an issue. My fears were completely unfounded. We battled against a deluging squall on Cold Pike, 60mph gusts on Grey Friar and Brim Fell and a wind chill of around freezing point. Carol's tenacity and indomitable spirit, never dwindled once over the course of the weekend. At the camp she revealed scars on her shins from being physically blown off her feet a couple of times! There hadn't been an utterance of complaint.

The turning point for us both was when we dropped down over Levers Hause, finally escaping the buffeting wind. Heading homeward, the finish now felt achievable. Before long we were running the final kilometre along the railway line and down into John Ruskin field. After 12 hours 37 minutes of running time and 2200m of ascent, we had achieved our goal and finished up first vets too!

Well done also to Richard Tiley and Jo Cleary who also won first vets in the Wansfell Class, Harry Scott and Jack Baker who finished 3<sup>rd</sup> and Rich and Jess Ensoll who finished 9<sup>th</sup>, both in the Harter Fell Class.

Whether or not anyone older than Carol has ever completed The Saunders, I do not know, but one thing is certain;

I am full of admiration for this legendary lady, who will be celebrating her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday next February. I can only feel humbled by her resilience and aspire to follow in her footsteps.

( bring on The Saunders MM 2044, I'll be 79! )

Jane Ligema

