

# SHOCK, HORROR, DISASTER - BUNNY SERIES IN JEOPARDY

Enjoy that chocolate Easter egg while you can, it could well be your last!

Cocoa growers are facing a worldwide crisis that could lead to dwindling supplies and higher prices. Growers on the Ivory Coast, source of most of the cocoa that goes into British chocolate, face crop devastation from black pod disease. At the same time Brazil, another major supplier, is being hit by fungus which attacks the trees. These combined diseases could wipe out the industry.

However never fear the Woodentops are already monitoring the chocolate situation closely, and are confident that Easter eggs will be the major prizes at the 1999 Bunny run series, the word is: "Chocolate lovers should not despair."

The British are the world's biggest chocoholics, munching their way through an extra 850,000 tonnes a year - 16% up on 10 years ago, have the Bunny runs which were conceived 6 years ago helped this mammoth increase of consumption?

## BUNNY RUN SERIES REPORTS - THE FOUR SEASONS

### Dry Bunny One

Despite admitting to making "a massive mistake" in choice of footwear, course record holder Ian Holmes had no difficulty in holding off a 189 strong field. This despite opting for road shoe flats instead of the more traditional studded fell shoe, he realised this after skirting round a deep puddle within the first 200 yards, and found things more difficult than anticipated.

17 year old Alan Baker of Rochdale Harriers caused the upset of the evening, he decided to run for the 'Egg Stage' prize that is incorporated within each race, his 50 yard lead was dramatically reduced approaching the rocky outcrop marker, as he paid for his exertions. He did hang on to clock 3.30, with Holmes a mere second behind, Alan's lactic acid legs then only allowed him to jog down the field before getting his second wind to finish 40th overall in 21.40.

Holmes went on to win by almost half a minute from Bingley team mate Robert Jebb who was celebrating his England call - up for the Knockdhu International at Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland. A regular bunny runner Holmes achieved his 11th victory since the races conception in 1992.

Spenboro's housewife Kath Drake, who set the W35 record of 21.27 last year, won the women's race in 53rd position half a minute ahead of Bradford's Andrea Dennison.

Drake wasn't the only female to steal the show however. Traditionally - attired 'Eccleshill Bunny Girl' Shelagh Hopkinson toed the line to raise money for the Scope Charity Appeal. Thankfully she was persuaded not to run in her black stilettos or her finishing time might well have been lower than her 33.55 for 167th position - a time that includes her 3-minute handicap to enable all the other

competitors to witness her charity effort. It was a busy evening's work for Shelagh, because afterwards she raised £90 with a raffle, and then sank a half-yard of ale in 2 minutes 10 seconds to rapturous applause all this still clad in her bunny outfit!

A new innovation this year was the introduction of the free yard and half yard of ale drinking contests, tonight's half yard was won by Ian Hill in 10.05 seconds, with over 60 Bernard Crowther second in 11.40 seconds.

### Snowy Bunny Two

Road closures and white-out conditions couldn't deter an impressive turn out of 164 runners, just 25 down on the previous Tuesday.

Although snow started falling at mid-day with about 2 inch falling during the race itself - many braved the long journey across the Pennines and from all points in Yorkshire to compete in arguably the most popular race series on the fell calendar. Joint British champion Ian Holmes and Kath Drake both made it two wins out of two with Holmes taking the 'Egg Stage' prize en-route in 3.47, two seconds clear of Gary Devine.

Despite the heavy snow and almost zero visibility, Holmes still clocked a respectable 18.05 - just six seconds down on the previous week, Drake fared almost as well running just nine seconds slower.

One evident feature was the amount of ladies having the energy to sprint finish, Ruth Dorrington beat Ruth Whitehead by one second for second, Helen Johnson defied Ann Lloyd by the same margin and Sharon Taylor beat Julie Holdsworth by the thickness of a vest. The list goes on.

Race organiser Dave Woodhead admitted to being "amazed" by the large turnout, adding "to be honest, when you think of how difficult it was

to just get here - people from places like Rochdale had to make a detour via Queensbury - I was expecting about forty to fifty. In the end we got 164 turning out to run 3 miles in a blizzard just for a Cadbury's Crème Egg! Can you believe it? It's not just the hardened fell runners either. We had 37 women finishers this time compared to 45 last Tuesday - an excellent turnout given the conditions."

The yard of ale contest attracted 3 competitors with Bernard Crowther ahead with 43.36 seconds, second Mark Bellas 48.56 seconds and Baildon's Quentin Lewis 122.25 seconds savouring the flavour.

### Wet Bunny Three

Former English junior champion Sean Willis notched up his second win in 3 days with a convincing late dash race surge. Willis, who won the English junior title 13 years ago, moved clear of Clayton's Mark Horrocks approaching the en-route 'Egg Stage' marker (which he won in 3.38) before allowing Dale Wilkinson of Rochdale back on level terms in the woods.

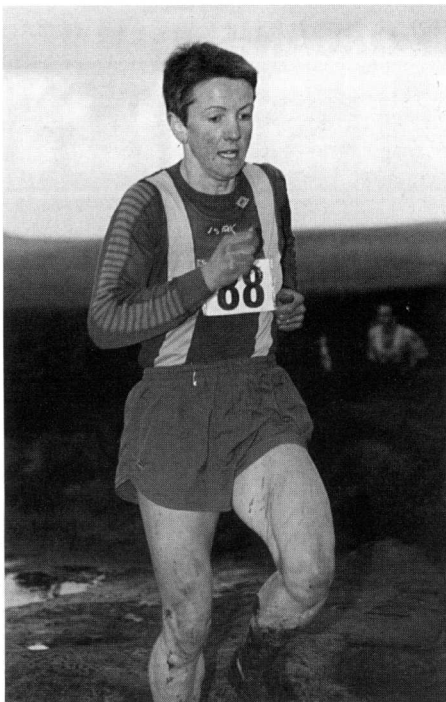
The Todmorden runner remained composed, however, and made his decisive burst in the final mile to come home half a minute clear of Wilkinson with Horrocks taking third a further 6 seconds back.

It was touch and go, though, whether Willis was going to make it to the start line. Although unsure of whether he would have recovered from his efforts in winning the Wardle Skyline over the weekend, Willis had been driving a van for much of the day for the engineering company he works for and only arrived at the start minutes before the off.

"Joanne (his fiancé) had been able to get a lift to the race before me as I wasn't sure



Steve Bottomley and Mick Addison find bunny girl Shelagh Hopkinson (Eccleshill) at the start of the race.  
Photo: Hazel Maddocks - Eccleshill's club supporter



*Kath Drake, 1st lady at BRI  
Photo: Peter Hartley*

I'd get there in time after driving all day," said Willis. "I had my gear with me, anyway, and once I'd decided to run and got going I felt fine."

Willis, who marries Joanne Dowling (18th in the women's race) this September, wasn't the only groom-to-be to place highly. Third placed Mark Horrocks tied the knot on 2nd May to another fell runner Juliet Whalley.

Kath Drake claimed her third win in a row to seal the best three - from - four series, the 36-year-old Spenboro' runner held off Ilkley's Helen Johnson by almost a minute as Ruth Whitehead of Bingley took third.

Despite torrential downpours, which tested the 216 runners including 51 ladies out on the course, one record was broken during the post-race festivities. Ian Hill of Bingley - 35th in the race and clearly saving himself - set a new record of 10.50 seconds for the now - traditional half yard of ale drinking contest.

#### **Windy Bunny Four**

Although Ian Holmes and Kath Drake secured series wins with maximum points, headline-maker for the evening, and perhaps the series, was 22-year-old Dark Peak fell runner, Jo Smith.

Smith, a highly competent orienteer, who is keen to turn her hand to more fell races in the future, clocked the second fastest time ever on this course, behind course record holder Lucy Wright's 19.16 with an excellent 20.01. Indeed, so good is Smith's time that it pushes European silver medallist Carol Greenwood's best of 20.06 back into third fastest overall. Smith went on to place an impressive 25th overall from a 216 strong field on her first ever visit to the race. Impressed by an armful of chocolate eggs, carrot cake and her bugs bunny baseball cap she could become a regular hopper. Just seconds ahead of Smith finished under 16 series winner Lee Broadley who won in all

his three outings of the series. Living near the race route, he often uses the route for training purposes, and hence if you ever need someone to follow, and pace it right Lee's your man!

Holmes notched up his 12th 'Egg Stage' win with 3.29, yet another record to this formidable runner.

The team awards was the closest ever with one point separating Rochdale from Bingley from P&B, Rochdale can thank a late surge by Alan Baker who edged out Martin Peace in the dash for the line.

The prize giving is a chocoholics dream with over 140 Easter eggs disappearing to the Bunny four race and then the overall series prize winners, party poppers, balloons etc. add to the occasion before the annual buffet is consumed.

#### **The Relay**

This popular event is run round the long lap only of the Bunny run course and is tried to be kept low key, so the organisers can unwind from the heavy demanding April schedule.

Twenty-nine teams turned up on a wet windy night, no wonder April was the wettest month on record for a century! Obviously no records were set, so Gary Devine's 13.07 and Anne Buckley's 14.43 remain in the record books.

A feature of the event is made up, mixed, family and friends teams are encouraged, along with the normal running clubs and prizes being available to these categories. Rochdale were victorious thanks to Andy Maloney recording the fastest time that night 13.44, but P&B were beaten into second by Quentin Lewis, Jason Hemsley and Steve Bottomley who made up the Half Yarders. In 15th were the Halifax Triers family mixed, Linda Crabtree who after helping record numbers in all previous four Bunny runs, helped her brother Michael and nephew Nick Fryer to victory in the family, mixed category.

Todmorden Harriers used the event as their club handicap, with a brilliant innovation of how to pick a team. With 3 boxes they put their slower runners in one, then their mediocre in another and their elite in the third, draw out one name from each box, then you have a team! The winners of their handicap were the Hot Toddlies comprising of Matthew Edwards, Barry Chapman and Keith Parkinson.

#### **NOT A LOT OF PEOPLE KNOW THIS.....**

Chocolate is regarded as an aphrodisiac by 31% of all women ... is this why so many take part in the Bunny Runs?

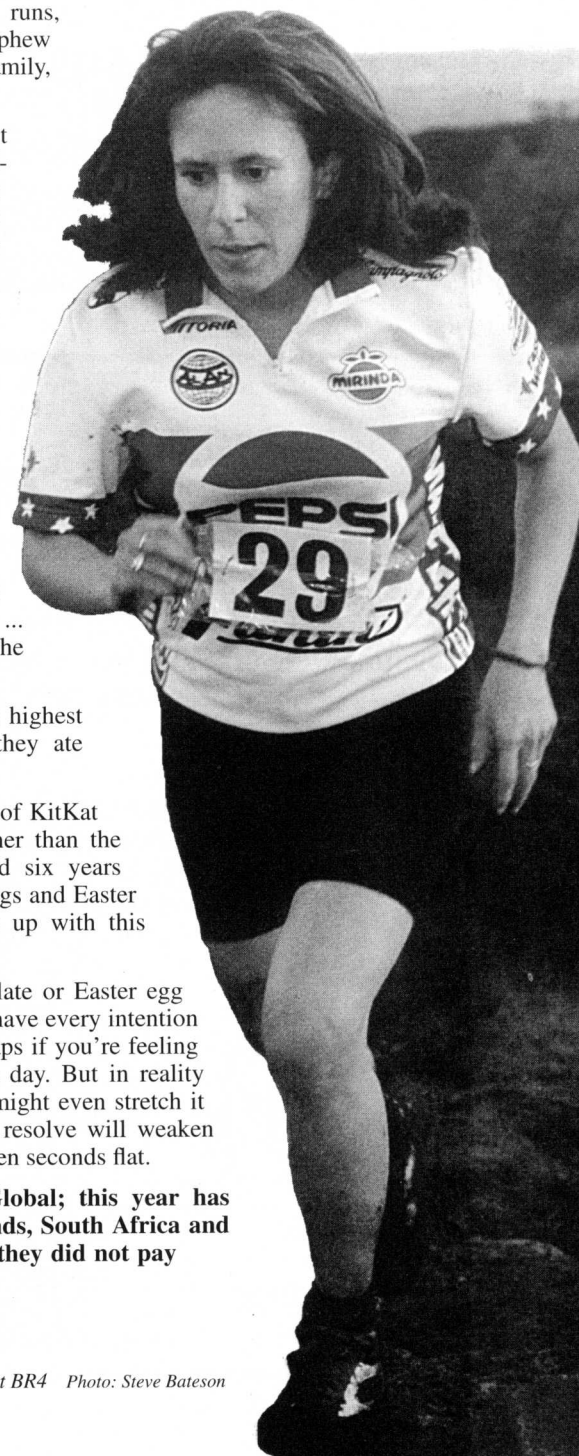
Three quarters of Northerners, the highest proportion in the country, said they ate chocolate to cheer themselves up.

One hours world-wide production of KitKat would make a pile 14 times higher than the Eiffel Tower .... how high would six years worth of the Bunny Run Crème eggs and Easter eggs equate to, if anyone comes up with this total we'd be interested to know.

Typically now, a packet of chocolate or Easter egg contains two bars. Of course, you have every intention of saving one bar until later, perhaps if you're feeling particularly saintly, even the next day. But in reality you might last five minutes, you might even stretch it to ten, but finally, inevitably, the resolve will weaken and you will polish off the rest in ten seconds flat.

**The Bunny Runs have gone Global; this year has seen runners from the Netherlands, South Africa and Australia, the organiser's stress they did not pay their expenses!**

*Runny and Pickled Egg*



*Ann Watling pictured at BR4 Photo: Steve Bateson*