



ORIGINAL MOUNTAIN MARATHON

**PRESS RELEASE**  
2ND NOVEMBER 2008

## **STATEMENT FROM JEN LONGBOTTOM, ORGANISER OF ORIGINAL MOUNTAIN MARATHON & MIKE PARSONS, EVENT OWNER**

The event lived up to the expectations of the competitors in being one of the most challenging Mountain Marathons in the world.

The Original Mountain Marathon (OMM) was founded 40 years ago with the concept of holding a 2-day mountain orienteering race with two consecutive marathons of 26 miles (42km) and a height gain of up to 8,000ft (2400m). It was the world's first venture of this kind and indeed a whole new type of sport called "adventure racing" has evolved from it. The competitors must use a combination of navigation, mountain and equipment skills. They come from all walks of life and are vetted for their ability and experience in the mountains, and take part as a team of two for safety. Teams are often described as fell runners but most have a broad range of mountaineering experience ranging from military (including "Special Forces") to outdoor instructor professionals and some of the UK's most renowned adventurers including previously the likes of the late Chris Brasher, Sir Ranulph Fiennes, John Disley and Alan Hinkes. They carry a tent, sleeping bag, spare clothing, food for 36 hours and other essential equipment to be self-sufficient in the hills.

The decision to call off the event in the early afternoon came about when the weather which, having been monitored closely before and during the event, deteriorated dramatically. Many runners said to us, "you made the right decision to start it and the right one to stop it" although many were very disappointed and most reaching camp were in condition to continue for day 2.

The event has always been held at the end of October to add the challenge of possibly inclement weather, and all of the 1,500 teams know they must co-operate in making the right decisions to complete the courses safely and gain the best results.

In the 40 years that we have been running the OMM, these have been by far the most demanding weather conditions to date. All the positive feedback from the competitors and the resultant lack of any serious injury supports our trust in the vetting process of these competitors and in the organisation of the event. The impact of the weather was felt much more severely at our operations centre where vehicles and property not left in designated areas were damaged.

## **STATEMENT FROM MIKE PARK, LEADER COCKERMOUTH MOUNTAIN RESCUE TEAM**

Cockermouth Mountain Rescue team leader Mike Park, who took part in the event and also, helped runners on the mountain as part of the rescue team said:

“I participated in this event and I knew what it was going to be like because I had competed in the OMM in the two years previously. The organisers notified mountain rescue about the event a month before they were going to be up here. They were fully aware of the weather forecast and it was their call on whether the race should go ahead.

“People who go out on the hills regularly will know that they can make mistakes. It’s from these mistakes that they learn. Ultimately, the mountain rescue teams were called to deal with a number of separate incidents which we did effectively.

“I have been a member of Cockermouth Mountain Rescue Team for 25 years, and have been Team Leader for the last 2 years.

“I feel very privileged to be a member of this Team and to be involved with Mountain Rescue, as it allows me to work with a bunch of friends who are the most dedicated volunteers in the country. The reason I regard these people as my friends, is because they are all, mountaineers, climbers, walkers, fellrunners, mountain bikers and orienteers first and foremost, and mountain rescue is just something we do sometimes.

“What I am trying to say, is last weekend, we just turned out to help a bunch of people like ourselves.”

## RESULTS

We have announced the results of the event and other information on our website. [www.theomm.com](http://www.theomm.com). In answer to many enquiries and requests from this year's runners, we will be putting the event on next year.

We would like to thank all of the event organising team, the competitor's, the local communities in the Lake District who supported us and the Mountain Rescue and Emergency services who became involved with the event and pledge to continue our support for them in the future.

## FACTS

In order to respond to many of the requests for specific information we are publishing the following facts:

**The Original Mountain Marathon 2008**

**Date: 25/26th October 2008**

**Venue: Seathwaite, Borrowdale, Cumbria, Lake District, UK.**

We recognize that there has been public concern over the costs to Cumbria NHS and the rescue services who aided the event. We believe that the following facts put the event in the correct perspective and enable anyone judging OMM event harshly to rebalance their opinion.

RAF Mountain Rescue is a Government funded body and there is no mechanism to make a contribution but our positive and warm thanks go to those RAF personnel who helped. Mountain Rescue Teams are charitably funded and are operated by volunteers. The event specific contributions are noted below.

## STATISTICS

Number of 2 person teams starting:	1427
Number of teams completing first-day:	795
Number of runners who were “led to safety <sup>1</sup> ”:	0
Number of runners “forced to sleep in a barn <sup>2</sup> ”:	0
Number of runners/event crew who were injured:	14
Number of runners/event crew needing treatment by Cumbria NHS:	10
Number of runners needing shelter in Cockermouth <sup>3</sup> :	0
Value of event to the local economy, estimated to be:	£100,000+
Event related donations to MRT base (English MRT’s) by 3rd November:	£7,000 and rising
Direct donations by OMM to MRT’s called to assist runners:	£7,000
Number of press reports world wide by 9am Monday 27th <sup>4</sup> :	2,000+
Number of unique visitors to theomm.com website over event weekend:	50,000 +
Number of pages served:	197,000

## NOTES

1. All made their way back to base by a route of their choice, other than those evacuated to Cockermouth against our advice.
2. All were fully equipped to spend a night in a tent, the barn was an option given the windy conditions, which a number of competitors chose to use.
3. The evacuation was not needed and not requested by us, and probably misguided; we had all the shelter necessary.
4. The event was covered by media from China, to New Zealand and was carried by Fox News in USA.
5. Donations can be made at:  
<http://www.justgiving.com/theomm08-mrtdonation>

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Each year the event is held in a different location, primarily chosen for the quality and difficulty of the terrain, a consequence of which can be isolation from the outside world. However, we make great efforts to provide reports and pictures and accurate progress information as soon as it is available. The aim before the event was to have broadband and satellite phone communications but neither proved possible and the only phone we had was reserved for event safety. We regret that this resulted in us being unable to provide correct and real time information to the press when a member of the public based at Honister quarries, made erroneous and continued statements to the press about the consequences. This was the root source of the worldwide press reportage and was responsible for the distress caused to many friends and families of the runners. We have already apologized for this in direct communications to all runners but in our opinion an apology from the Honister café owner is still outstanding.

Thanks go to the Raynet team, who as always, provided vital radio communications cover enabling us to call MR services promptly and quickly when needed to keep runners safe but this network is not open for other than safety matters.

Mike Park, Leader of Cockermouth Mountain Rescue Team (event competitor/Mountain Rescue Team Leader) said he was pleased that we (the organisers) could see so clearly what the up-to-date figures for competitor location were. By Sunday 12.00 midday there were only 8 teams who had not yet checked in and this had been narrowed down to 3 teams by 13.30 hrs. A number of teams, when contacted by HQ, were on their way home. Another team had been safe in a B&B for the night, before calling police. (This information was not relayed to Event HQ. This is not a criticism; we do not expect the Police to provide an admin service for the event.)

## **MEDIA COVERAGE**

There have been some appalling pieces of journalism over the event weekend. There are others that stand out as particularly good and this particular article by Richard Askwith is the best we have seen:

<http://tinyurl.com/OMM-Independent> (redirects to the Independent website)

This comment by Peter Tyldesley Director of Countryside & Land Management 2004-2007, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, who competed in the M Score class sums up what dozens of runners have been telling the press.

‘As many commentators have said more eloquently than I can, the OMM represents the last vestiges of a spirit of self-reliance that the British used to be famous for. We must defend those last vestiges at all costs.’

## **SUPPORT EXTERNAL TO THE EVENT**

Thanks has to go at this stage to all the people who before, during and after the event gave their support. Over the 40 years that the event has been held a very competent band of volunteers has evolved. Added to this the professional services of event organization teams provided by the Scout Movement in Yorkshire and RAYNET, The Radio Amateurs’ Emergency Network which is the UK’s national voluntary communications service provided for the community by licensed radio amateurs.

After the event had been “called off” thanks must also go to many other people who volunteered their services either in providing accommodation and hot food and in particular to the Mountain Rescue Teams of Cockermouth, Keswick, Penrith and Wasdale who give their services, without charge, as they do to anyone requesting help in the hills. Also to RAF Mountain Rescue which is a facility maintained both for military and civilian purposes. To all the runners and the outdoor community at large, helping to explain to the world what we are all about. Most especially to those individuals who came and shook our hands or called to voice support, amongst whom were Gary Thompsett, Planning director, Detail Events running in Elite class, Nick Gracie his team partner, Brendan Foster of Nova International Ltd the great North Run organisers, my own running group TNRG and so many more.

The 42nd Original Mountain Marathon will be held on the weekend of October 24/25th 2009. The region will be announced late Feb as entries open on the OMM website.