**The FRA and the Media**
The Fell Runners Association Committee has long held the view that people who really wish to spend time on the fells will find their way to them naturally and they will not need full colour articles in glossy, lifestyle magazines to alert them to the glories of the great outdoors. And those that do will probably need a 4x4 SUV to get there.

The FRA Committee further believes that those who wish to compete on the fells in races will find their way to the FRA, which manages fell racing in England on behalf of UK Athletics, and its Calendar. Despite the FRA choosing not to cooperate with those in the media, who have really identified a business opportunity to sell more magazines etc. but will veil this by claims to have the interests of fell running at heart and so wish to raise its profile, the FRA now has over 7,000 members, around 1,000 of who joined in the two years following the publication of *Feet in the Clouds.*
That fell runners see their sport as inclusive and growing in popularity may prompt warm feelings but the growth in membership has a downside: accusations of damage to the environment (e.g. erosion, creation of new paths), restrictions by landowners who are wary of the increasing numbers taking part in races and a general overcrowding of people and vehicles at rural race venues.

All events have an infrastructural physical limit, even city marathons, and attempting to seek that quantitative limit in a sport where space and tranquillity and nature are some of the attractions is bizarre.

One of the virtues of fell running is that one can currently stand on the start line of a Championship race next to the greatest fellrunners of all time: but for how long if such races are limited to, say, 250 runners and the membership continues to rise to 8,000, 10,000, 12,000?

By its nature fell runners are guests on other people’s land, as are other visitors with an equal right to be there. They have the right not to be overwhelmed by an avalanche of descending fell runners. Runners rely on the good will of the owners or guardians of the land: farmers, the National Trust, Water Utilities, who are not remunerated but largely allow access because of a shared common feeling for the countryside. But goodwill has its limits and when a landowner decides that, say, 100 runners running over his land is the limit that leaves at least some of the other 6900 FRA members with a sense of frustration that they cannot take part in their chosen event.

So, to quote the late Mike Rose from when he was FRA General Secretary, and whose words are still retained on the FRA website in the “How to Join” section:

*The Environment*
*Fell running is perhaps unique amongst sports in that it does not seek to attract ever greater numbers of participants. The reason for this policy is that we have to balance our sporting interests with the impact on the environment. The sad fact is that the hills of Britain simply will not cope with ever increasing pounding of feet. Protecting the environment is one of our primary aims. We continually liaise with agencies and land owners over access and racing over environmentally sensitive areas. The Fell Runners Association will continue to protect your interests in these and many other matters.*
And yet despite the FRA’s opposition to publicity, the membership continues to grow in total and there is, of course, also a significant turnover as older members leave the sport-even fell runners die one day- to be replaced by young members: the sport is vibrant. Junior fell running particularly so.

Like many sports fell running can be dangerous but unlike most sports an injury to a fell runner is more likely to happen in the “middle of nowhere” than close to medical support. Despite the inherent risk of danger linked to running over difficult terrain in mountainous areas in remote locations in the foulest of weather, the sport has a good safety record. Helped by the strict safety requirements imposed by the FRA on race organisers in demanding that race competitors carry the safety equipment: map, compass, full wind/water proof gear, etc. that a runner might need, once will do, to save his life. But, most importantly, the sport is a safe one because of the good sense that fell runners develop over the years by learning to ensure their personal safety on the fells in different weather and over different terrain. Not quite the same learning curve as someone reading an article about fell running in a Sunday colour cookery-fashion-lifestyle comic and being inspired to set off up Scafell Pike in flip flops and a hat on a nice sunny day.

And, mindful of safety: FRA Officers *have* cooperated with the media where FRA views have been sought about safety on the fells.

As outdoor people, who care for the environment and respect the people who live and work in the areas where we enjoy ourselves, it would be perverse if the FRA were not to welcome more people getting out on to the hills. The FRA is not “pulling up the drawbridge". It welcomes newcomers who may arrive with a wide outdoor/orienteering/climbing/mountaineering background (and even the like of me who came from road marathons) and know how to look after themselves, know enough to take the proper clothing on to the hills and know how to get off the hill if the cloud comes down or the hail/snow starts so they do not have to bleat into a mobile phone for mountain rescue to save their spoiled day.

Not all publicity is bad publicity and an obscure, small fell race with barely enough entrants to break even might welcome some media attention, and who would oppose this? But on a larger scale whenever I am approached by the media promising to “raise the profile” of fell running my simple question is “I understand how you and your employer will profit from your proposal; but how will your article/ film/ podcast/TV programme/book benefit my sport?”

I have never received a satisfactory answer.

Graham Breeze