**South Downs Trail Marathon, Sunday 24th April**

Thought I’d send you this report from last Sunday’s 45k South Downs Trail Marathon, where I finished 3rd in a time of 4h56m (results attached).

As part of my preparation for the 250 mile Cape Wrath Ultra at the end of May, I ran the LDWA South Downs Trail Marathon last Sunday 24th April.  At 28 miles / 45k it’s at the bottom end of ultra distances, but with 1300m of elevation, it’s quite a hilly course with some spectacular scenery including the Seven Sisters, Birling Gap, Firle Beacon and the Long Man of Wilmington.  Although I was treating the race largely as a training run, I was aiming for a time of around 5 hours, and had decided not to stop at any of the checkpoints but to just make my two hydration flasks last the whole race.  As usual, I started off reasonably slowly, taking the first couple of kilometres easy as we climbed uphill out of East Dean to the coastal section of the South Downs Way and a sequence of up and downs along the Seven Sisters.  I ran the downhills as hard as I could in order to replicate the kinds of downhills I would be facing in Scotland, and soon joined a pack of 3-4 runners near the front.  As the route moved inland, this group stayed close together, and I passed CP1 and then the halfway point in second place within this bunch, at which point the long climb up to Firle Beacon started. Given the steepness of the climb, we all switched to more like a 25:75 hike/run, before the slope flattened out and we were treated to a long, fast descent towards CP3 at Alfriston. With only 13km to go, we then hit the last big climb up to the Long Man of Wilmington at which point I started to lose a bit of ground to the 2 leaders. They were only a few hundred metres in front, but as we reached the top of the climb and started to run at full pace again, it proved hard to make up the gap (not helped by missing a turning on the way back into East Dean) and I ended up finishing 4 minutes behind them in 3rdplace.

Happy with the time and happy with the placing, particularly as the race came after a heavy couple of weeks of training with no taper, and only 3 weeks after the 300km Northern Traverse.  Next week (2nd May) is the 50k Long Way Round Ultra and then the 60k Bewl Water Ultra on 7th May to give me a couple more training races before 2 weeks of tapering and the 400k Cape Wrath Ultra up the North West coast of Scotland.   As well as being good preparation for Cape Wrath, the ground conditions were very hard and rocky, giving my knees and feet a good examining and which will be good preparation for the Summer Spine race along the Pennine Way in June, which has similarly hard-packed trails at this time of year.

Rgds, Anthony