

SECRETARY'S REPORT 2006

Like 2005, 2006 been a busy year, and the FRA seems to have had more than its fair share of crises to deal with throughout the year. But three crises in particular stick in my mind.

- Not only were we left without a Junior Coordinator (at the last minute) but the Junior Coordinator post changed hands twice over the year - and it's a very big thank you to Madeleine and her colleagues who have not only rescued a very difficult situation, but have also shown us just how the job really ought to be done.
- In the middle of the year, our Chairman's sudden heart attack shocked us all and, for a time, we needed to spread Alan's fairly hefty workload among several willing committee members. Fortunately, Alan is now much improved and, as he retires his FRA position at this AGM, he is no doubt preparing to hand over the reins to his successor. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for all his work, and I wish him every success in his new position as Chairman of the Competition Management Group, where I'm sure he'll be looking after our interests as he always has done.
- And, of course, there was the UK Athletics *Qualified Officials Cock-Up* which was to rumble on right through the year, and which caused so much extra work, so much extra expense and so much unavoidable aggro, that I will dedicate the rest of this report to giving you my version of this farce. Please note that this may not be the complete picture; it is simply the story as I see it ... and I make no apologies for that!!

The problem first manifested itself last year when a draft rule change regarding Endurance Event Officials, was circulated from UK Athletics Technical Subcommittee to the PST. Our Chairman Alan Barlow expressed our concerns about the imposition of qualified officials without any consultation, proper reasoning or current infrastructure, and suggested that fell running should NOT be included in the list of disciplines affected. Unfortunately the advice was not heeded, and Appendix E appeared with these rules in their original state in the 2006 rule book last April.

Subsequently, a meeting between the FRA and David Moorcroft (Chief Exec, UKA) and Spencer Barden (Head of Endurance, UKA) was organised and, at this meeting, it was apparent that these two senior management figures were totally unaware of the rule change – but they were appreciative of the effects that it would have on our sport, and seemed anxious to make amends.

So, following this meeting, there were various discussions via email, and these ultimately gave rise to a set of three emails from Bryan Smith (Director, UKA) which between them stated that this rule did NOT apply to fell running. However, because we did not have a single authoritative document clearly spelling out the waiver, the September meeting of the FRA Committee insisted that clarification was sought.

Unfortunately, when Bryan Smith received this request for clarification, he asked for advice on the matter and was informed that all fell running events would need at least one qualified official, and that this was at the insistence of the insurers. (It later turned out that each of these statements was, in fact, incorrect.)

At this point we began to smell a rat because those of us who work in the financial sector are aware that insurers are rarely as prescriptive as this, because it exposes them to a financial liability which is entirely avoidable. However, despite our concerns, we had to address the problem somehow. We didn't want to lose races in 2007 because of lack of officials – but neither we did we like the idea of automatic qualification, as we considered that this would probably turn out to be meaningless if ever a case were brought to court.

We did seriously discuss disaffiliation from the UKA, and managed to obtain two alternative insurance quotations which were easily affordable, and which would give identical cover to that provided by the current UKA insurance. We even devised a scheme whereby we could use our own insurance and rules, but still cooperate with UKA, providing the same services which we currently provide at a UK level, for instance Championships, Relays and International Selection etc.

However, at a meeting in Preston in early October, the FRA Committee could not agree completely to the deal because there were still issues which needed investigation, and it opted to stay in the UKA fold – causing the resignation of both Dave Jones (Magazine Editor) and Margaret Chippendale (Fixtures Secretary). I even considered resigning myself, but I thought that if all opposition to the UKA steamroller were to walk, the sport would ultimately suffer. I decided that it would be far better to stay and fight.

Two other things came out of the Preston meeting. We decided to create a new subcommittee which would seek to identify future options for the FRA, looking into all relevant aspects. I also wrote a letter to David Moorcroft deploring the current method of changing rules, and highlighting the difficulties created by the new ruling, and the feelings of the FRA Committee.

This letter ultimately gave rise to a meeting on 8 November 2006, where we talked to both UKA and to their insurers, and we discussed all these problems. At this meeting we confirmed that:-

- The insurers had nothing to do with the demands for qualified officials.
- There was no reasoned requirement for qualified officials.
- Liability insurance is dependent upon the race organiser being a member of a body affiliated to UKA.
- Liability insurance applies to any helpers under the direction of the race organiser, regardless of whether they are qualified or not.
- Failure to follow best practice does not invalidate insurance, but creates a situation where a negligence case might be brought. The insurance covers the cost of the legal defence for that claim, should it arise.
- BUT best practice should always be followed, as excessive insurance payouts will only lead to higher premiums etc.
- FRA Safety Rules are accepted as best practice by UKA.
- Appendix E would not apply to fell running until 2008, by which time it will have been rewritten with input from the FRA.

All the work and effort which has gone into managing this problem has been very expensive in terms of FRA Committee members' time and effort and, more importantly, feelings.

I run for a fell-running-only club, and I do not always see the relevance of UKA's management methods. However, as a committee, we do need to cater for ALL our members, and there are many who do run in other disciplines, who run internationally or who have children who also love to run on the hills. These are all issues which need to be catered for in any future fell running management model, and the subcommittee which is looking into the FRA's future options will keep this in view as it carries on gathering information. It will present the options, with recommendations, to the main FRA Committee early next year.

I hope that this explanation has been helpful, and that you can see that we don't always simply accept what UKA throws at us. Ultimately, we may become an independent body – it's difficult to tell at the moment. Whatever happens, the FRA Committee will always try to look after the best interests of OUR sport, our race organisers and our runners.

Alan Brentnall
General Secretary
Fell Runners Association
November 2006