

the story of wooler hostel

Chevy Chase



The Chevy Chase is Northumberland's first challenge event. The Chevy (from Cheviot) had its origin in a discussion at the 1954 YHA Northumberland and Tyneside AGM as to how to get the young urban population of post-war and ration-book free, smoky Tyneside out into the 'green lungs' of the Cheviots.

The first race took place on Sunday October 2nd 1955, attracting eight entries. It began at Alnham Youth Hostel and finished at Wooler Youth Hostel, with competitors free to choose their own route between these two points as long as it included Cheviot summit, where an umpire was in place to make sure everyone passed by. Geoff Cobbing (aged 18), wearing vest, shirt, shorts, socks and commando-soled boots was the first to set off, the others following at 5 minute intervals. Malcolm Chesney of Gateshead running in plimsols came first in 3 hours 42 minutes, with Geoff arriving 4 minutes later. Their prizes were 30 shillings and 20 shillings respectively, plus a medal.

Circumstances throughout the history of the Chevy Chase have dictated change. In its second year (1956) entrants were required to wear boots and carry a rucksack weighing at least 10 lbs. In 1957 women entrants had to carry a small pack while the men's was increased to 15 pounds. Following the closure of Alnham hostel in 1958 the race was begun from Kirk Yetholm Youth Hostel.

In 1968 Hedgehope Hill, Langlee Craggs and Skirl Nook were included within a new 17-mile route. At the same time, because of a blizzard the previous October, the event was rescheduled to a date between Easter and June. In the 1960s the Chevy Chase included a Junior Race, but this ceased in 1987 through lack of interest.

The place of this now classic hill-challenge across 20 miles of Cheviot upland is now firmly established in the Fell Runner's Calendar. Only twice has the race had to be cancelled; in 1967 and 2001 due to outbreaks of Foot and Mouth.

To maintain a 'safe' event, a race against time in a wild, exposed upland environment and offer a competitor freedom of the fells is a difficult balance. Safety has always been a paramount consideration, and over the last fifteen years the Chevy Chase has introduced the safeguards that challenge events in upland areas now demand. The Northumberland National Park Mountain Rescue Team, a small army of volunteers and the checkpoint communications provided by RAYNET, help towards achieving this balance.

In 2004 Wooler Running Club, which had itself grown out from the presence of the Chevy Chase, took over the organisation of the event from the YHA. The Chevy Chase evokes the spirit of an open wild landscape and all those taking part are a testimony to this.

