

RECORD ATTEMPT
Fell runner Paul Wilson



WHAT MER CAN YOU ASK FOR?

Bergans of Norway know a thing or two about winter-warm baselayers and they have come up trumps with some great Merino wool designs in fantastic colours.

The Bergans Fjellrapp 210g long-sleeved top comes in purple stripes for women and green stripes for guys. It is priced from £50 at www.srcunningham.co.uk

SANDISON'S SCOTLAND

BRUCE SANDISON IS A JOURNALIST, ANGLER AND AUTHOR OF A STRING OF BEST-SELLING BOOKS ABOUT SCOTLAND'S OUTDOORS. HE LIVES IN SUTHERLAND.



NOT A BA' WAY TO SPEND NEW YEAR'S DAY IF YOU HAVE THE ENERGY

On New Year's Day in Kirkwall in Orkney, a crowd of young and not-so-young men wait impatiently on Broad Street in front of St Magnus Cathedral for the start of the famous game of Ba'.

At the Market Cross, west of the entrance to the old red sandstone building, a veteran Ba' player proudly holds aloft a hand-made, brown and black patterned leather, cork-packed ball, the object of everyone's rapt attention.

As the hands on the face of the clock reach one and the hour is struck, the ball is flung into the midst of the waiting horde.

Bedlam ensues as a forest of finger-wide human hands rise to catch the ball.

When it is caught, it immediately disappears into the centre of the throng. Several hundred determined and seemingly deranged men form themselves into two opposing groups, shoving, heaving and shouting encouragement to those in the middle of the massive scrum. The traditional New Year's Day men's Ba' game, played between the Uppies and the Doonies, is under way.

This is a fierce, no-holds-barred battle. It is played through the streets of the town, as it has been for over two centuries.

To win, the Doonies must immerse the ball in the cold waters of the harbour, while the Uppies must touch the ball against the wall at Mackinson's Corner where New Scapa Road, Main Street and Junction Road meet.

The game may last for less than an hour or all day and well into the night. It only ends when one or other of the opposing sides reaches their goal and the single rule is that there are no rules.

The game is as demanding for spectators as it is for the players. Nothing stands in the way of those trying to move the Ba' through the narrow streets of the town.

Often, because of the number of men in the scrum, the exact location of the Ba' is unknown.

Is it in the pack or has somebody spirited it away? In truth, the whole affair appears to be a near riot and as such, the authorities, to whom all riot is an anathema, have often tried to 'civilise' the event but to no avail.

An imaginary line, drawn through Kirkwall and at right-angles to the Market Cross, divides the town.

If you were born to the south of the line you are an Uppie and from "Up-the-Gates".

Those born north of the line are Doonies, from "Down-the-Gates"; the word "gates" coming from the Old Norse "gata" meaning road.

Team members are also known as being either Earl's Men (Doonies, from the old part of Kirkwall) or Bishop's Men (Uppies, from the newer part).

The Kirkwall Ba' is entrenched in the history and culture of the community and is a great leveller.

Everyone, policeman, lawyer, doctor, farmer, fisherman, joiner, plumber, builder, compete together in furious and friendly rivalry. One famous player, Jim Cromarty, told me: "The game will never die." The next time you visit Kirkwall, think carefully about how you are going to arrive and whether you want to be an Uppie or a Doonie, a badge that will stay with you for the rest of your life.



HISTORIC The annual game of Ba' in Orkney is steeped in ritual

TAKE THREE..

If you want to improve your training performance this year, a GPS watch with heart rate monitor is the way to go.

SAVE
Garmin Forerunner 10 GPS sports watch

This tracks distance, speed, location and calories. It's water-resistant and you track progress by uploading runs to Garmin Connect. £89.99, www.halfords.com



SPEND

Geonate ONmove 7210 GPS watch
A GPS watch with heart rate monitor and lots of features, including training, challenge, stretching and guidance modes, as well as target zones and lap data. £149.99, www.decathlon.co.uk



SPLURGE

Suunto Ambit2 S with HR
The Ambit2 S includes every feature to keep you on track to perform your best. It is perfect for runners, cyclists, swimmers and triathletes. £324.99, www.ellis-brigham.com



CAN YOU BEAT THE BORDERS?

Entries have opened for a 12-hour multi-activity challenge event in the Scottish Borders. Melrose-based Beat the Border includes bike, hike and adventure obstacles. The challenge, which takes place on August 30, 2014 can be raced as a 40-mile bronze, 48-mile silver or 58-mile gold route.

There is an "early bird" discount until the end of January of £45. The entry fee then rises each month in £5 increments until it reaches £65. See www.beattheborders.co.uk

OPEN WATER GOAL
Swimmers dive in



CELTMAN CHALLENGE
Ironman veteran Hannah Kemlo

FOR 2014

THE WEEK



The valley farmland contributes significantly to the character and interest of the landscape.

The pattern of isolated farmsteads with drystone dykes and open

pasture, set against a backdrop of rugged mountains, steep valley sides and woods is a powerful attraction both here and in Glen Lyon and Loch Tummel.