

CROSS COUNTRY RUNNING AT NORHAM

There's no fear, only the field leading up the hill to a gateway.

The journey is physical and the mind is focused. Cold and wind prove a point, hitting the runner full on. But he knows the score; there are competitors; they are breathing heavily beside him. The weather is another competitor, it has no favourites. It's just a fact, something that can't be avoided. In alliance with the weather the cross country course itself throws up more challenges. Before it's done there will be boulders on the path, banks and steep hills. Zig zag tracks through trees and mud; deep black mud, up to your knees. It sucks at the running shoes, trying to pull them off. If they are laced tightly the runner is triumphant, if not... disaster. Then long descents. One of them takes us through a burn. Do we really have to go around this twice?

The runner is muddy, hot and wet; breathing in bursts; steam, phlegm and snot in his wake.

There are choices; most of them unconscious. Is it merely survival till the end? Do we want to beat our rivals, or at least that arse in front of us? In the zone and focused. Seeing the traps and the pitfalls; moving faster on the flat. So many twists and turns, potholes and stumps, rocks sticking out of the ground. Suddenly it's desperate; where's the end? It needs to come and now! And there it is below; around the next field and down the hill; about half a mile to go.

The runner feels lighter, steaming in, chasing the guy in front. Fatigue lifts like a mist and he's running hard.

Past the finish and the runner feels as one with his companions. What a group of people they are, they have beaten the course and the weather. They have red and purple skin, and a mud jacket to prove it.

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