

## Hash House Harriers 'ON YOU'

### Chapter 1 This is Hashing on the Isle of Wight

The view from near the summit of Clatterford Hill on the Isle of Wight is spectacular. To the east is Carisbrook Castle a huge stone monolith guarding the island's capital, Newport. To the west, a line of perfectly rounded hills marches down to the horizon, the shadows of clouds gradually drifting across them. To the North is the Solent and a clear view across to Portsmouth and Southampton Water; white sails billowing in the wind on hundreds of small sailing craft. The only blot on the landscape is the oil refinery at Fawley; black smoke staining the sky, spoiling what is otherwise an idyllic scene.

I actually have very little time to take this all in, as I am attempting to run up to the top of the hill as quickly as possible. It is eleven thirty on Sunday morning and I consider, not for the first time, what I am doing here. I could have stayed in bed with my wife, watched the television, read the newspapers and convinced one of my children to make me a cup of tea. But, no, I had travelled the seven miles from Ryde to Newport just to follow a trail of white flour over a five-mile course; the blobs of flour are leading up what feels like a vertical incline. I am trying to convince my legs to move and losing the argument!

This is hashing! There are about thirty of us, all climbing the hill and looking for flour. The Hash House Harriers is called by some the drinking club with a running problem. This is not far from the truth! Every Sunday a group of us get together to follow a trail laid out the day before by a fellow hasher known as a hare. The trail starts at a pub and finishes back at the same pub.

Three white blobs in a row mean the trail goes in this direction; a call of 'On! On!' indicates the trail has been found. A circle indicates a check; these are located at junctions and mean that all of the directions should be checked out until three blobs of flour are found. A call of 'On You!' means 'does the trail go this way?'

I leave checking activities to those fit members of the Hash who can actually run rather than trot, as if you get the direction wrong you will have to run back and catch up with everyone else. There are also fishhooks (flour laid in the shape of a hook on the trail) that require the first five or so runners who reach them to turn round and run to the back of the pack. This is a good idea as it slows down the fit ones, preventing them from getting too far ahead. There are also line outs - white lines of flour that are not to be crossed under any circumstances.

Excellent news! The path at the top of the hill is 'lined out': all those runners in front of me are making their way back down the hill. I am now third from the front rather than trailing at the back. I will make the most of this, putting on a downhill spurt and keeping well ahead. A nice idea, but Shergar\*1 has just passed me - he clearly has good form on the downhill dry sections. Stalker is also closing in; he is a proper runner who takes marathons in his stride. Disaster! A fish hook I am fifth in line - I should really go back behind the rest of the pack and then run on, I will try and avoid this by pretending I have missed it. I am sure no one will notice, as I am not usually the type to get involved in fishhooks.

I seem to have got away with the fishhook. No one is paying me any attention; it is all downhill now and very easy going. I can hear the gentle babbling of a stream ahead. The trees are forming a canopy over the path and the ground is dappled with sunlight. This running is pretty good; everything is fine with the world.

Oh, No! There is a ford in the road and the bridge for pedestrians is 'lined out'. In the middle of the water is Hard On (don't ask!) who enjoys baptising people I am not talking about a few splashes either. He seems to be of the Baptist persuasion - only full immersion will do. Hard On is at least six foot two inches and weighs about nineteen stone. He seems to be involved in an attempt to drown Dangerous, a large, bald cockney who used to know gangsters in the East End of London (hence the name Dangerous). I will sneak through while they are occupied.

I am now very wet - Dangerous and Hard On united against the sneaky Navigator who evaded a fishhook earlier on. The water was fairly cold but I did not go under without a fight! At least they are both soaked as well! The trail is now heading uphill towards Carisbrook Castle. I feel a short cut coming on. Hard On is joining me and we are dripping our way back towards the pub and the cars. A quick change of clothes and we are ready for a few beers.

\*1 Hashers generally have a hash handle (nick name by which they are known to other hashers). Hash members give these names to each other, usually in response to some misdemeanour. Shergar is an Irish guy who runs like a horse, he also got lost (went missing) on his first ever run. I am called Navigator because of my inability to find anywhere. Some others are known as Fat Bastard, Miss Whiplash, and Shit for Brains (never has a name been more apt!).

The Waverly pub (named after a paddle steamer that used to travel between Southampton and Cowes) is situated at the top of the High Street Carisbrook and is basically a Victorian building that had a makeover in the early 60s: the windows are small and rectangular; cream coloured window frames are spaced regularly in a two storey brick box. There is a good-sized car park and a peeling sign showing the paddle steamer in all her former glory.

Inside, the 60s theme continues, with two separate bars, one used for dining. The tables no longer have Formica tops but they could quickly revert if given a chance! A narrow passage leads to a small door and you eventually arrive in the drinking bar. This is furnished with a few seats around the edge and just two small tables.

Extract from Cherbourg

After a few hours sleep back at the hotel Du Louvre we met up to go for the evening meal. The hash split into separate groups and about ten of us decided to go to the La Taverna restaurant just down the road. Snowman was not keen on spending much money on grub but we eventually convinced him to give it a go. Our group was directed upstairs and we got the top floor to ourselves. The waitress was efficient and patient with our inability to read French. Most of us decided to go for a moules starter and steak or chicken to follow. Cooperman was hungry so he ordered a moules starter and an extra large steak with French fries.

The moules were spectacular; a white wine and garlic sauce made every mouthful a gastronomic experience. We each had a ceramic pot full of them - about the size of a dustbin. They went on forever with sticks of bread to mop up the sauce. Snowman was instantly a convert to French cuisine - he had never tasted anything like it. We had several bottles of wine to wash it all down and then the traditional long break before the next course. We needed it as we were all stuffed with crustacean bi-valves.

After a good half an hour the steaks started to arrive. I was glad I had gone for the small one as it was about 32 ounces and covered the entire surface of a large dinner plate. When Cooperman's large one arrived it was astonishing; it didn't arrive on a plate, it was served on a wooden platter about the size of a small raft. The chips just kept on coming and Coops was determined to eat it all. The cream and brandy sauce was incredibly rich but he eventually managed to plough his way through this mountain of food. He sat slumped at the table totally immobile and turning green. 'Fancy a pudding Coops?' asked a rather insensitive Fracas! 'Sod off!' came the reply