

CROSS-COUNTRY HISTORY



From the world championships (above) to local league and schools events, cross country is a big part of the athletics calendar

CROSS-COUNTRY running enthusiasts and athletics fans with a thirst for history will find a new book by Andrew Boyd Hutchinson to be essential reading.

The Complete History of Cross-Country Running – from the 19th Century to the present day is a comprehensive review of the sport as it chronicles every part of its background in 400 pages.

The only downside is that this mouth-watering feast of cross-country history is not out until the new year. But *AW* has seen a preview of the book and can confirm it is an immense work of around 400 pages that is sure to stand the test of time as a definitive source of history for one of athletics' most traditional disciplines.

The author is a keen cross country runner himself and his love of the sport is obvious as he has painstakingly logged the major events in the history of the sport over the past couple of hundred years.

This is not merely a regurgitation of events, though. While the book is big, it is also edited well and he has plucked the most interesting and significant events and athletes to focus on.

So while each chapter moves through the history from the early 1800s to the present day, it is broken up with 'event spotlight' and 'did you know?' boxes and all of it is an easy, entertaining, informative read.

The book has a slight US bias, but the early section on the origins of cross country focus very much on England and, specifically, Shrewsbury School in the Midlands, which is credited with being the place where "the first recorded evidence of cross-country running as a sport appeared at the dawn of the Victorian Age" in 1819.

As an example of the style of writing in the book, the author writes: "The Shrewsbury schoolboys harnessed their adolescent adrenaline, answered the call of the outdoors, and aligned with their comrades to escape the rigour and discipline of the classroom. These were the seeds that allowed the sport to grow on a global scale."

From then on, the book charts the growth of the sport across the United States and indeed around the world. Naturally, the impact of athletes from East African nations is also explored in detail.

Craig Virgin, twice world cross-country champion at the start of the 1980s, has given the book his seal of approval and writes a nice preface. In this he explains the beauty of cross-country but also includes his concerns about its current status in global athletics.

Virgin writes that Seb Coe's appointment as IAAF president is good for cross country, for example, as he explains: "The survival of the IAAF World Cross Country Championships may hang in the balance over the next few years."

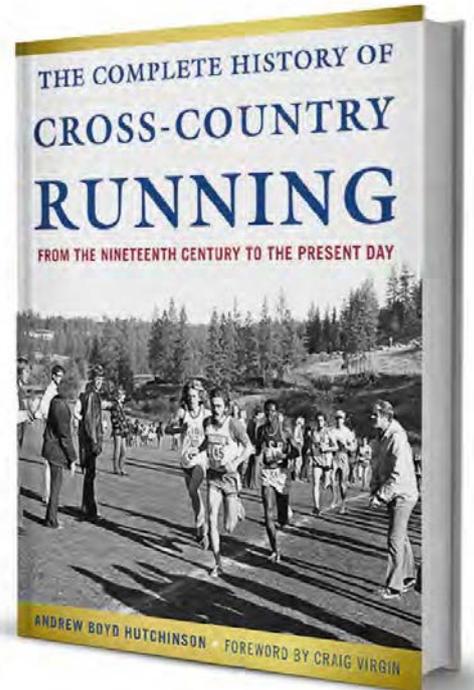
He adds: "Cross-country will soon need "friends in high places" if the IAAF is to rebrand and reorganise the World Championships in order to survive and thrive into the future."

Hutchinson agrees and expands in the pages as he says: "Cross-country has a rich, international tradition. For more than 200 years it has thrilled audiences and participants alike, has provided a natural venue for athletes, and now attracts runners of all ages. But some of the biggest names in cross-country are worried about the difficulties in growing the sport."



MARK SHEARMAN

**JASON HENDERSON
REVIEWS AN
UPCOMING BOOK
THAT PROVIDES
A DEFINITIVE
BACKGROUND TO
CROSS-COUNTRY
RUNNING**



■ *The Complete History of Cross-Country Running – from the 19th Century to the Present Day* by Andrew Boyd Hutchinson is published by Carrel Books for £35.99 hardback and is out in January

“There are multiple reasons why: lack of enthusiasm from professional coaches, the biennial structure of the world championship, format changes ranging from race distances to monetary compensation, and dominance by specific nations.”

Related to this, the book briefly explores the growth of obstacle course racing and gives an interesting explanation on why it has managed to secure sponsorship and massive growth in participation thanks to smart marketing while the more traditional sport of cross-country running

has seemingly struggled in comparison for popularity.

Certainly, if cross-country running is to enjoy a major revival then one of its great strengths is its history and this book demonstrates that it has it in abundance (see *Comment*, p4).

LIFE THROUGH CORRIDORS OF UNCERTAINTY

THE VAST majority of athletics books tend to centre on an athlete’s life in the sport, rather than their achievements outside of that, writes Alastair Aitken.

Dave Morgan, 72, not only expresses himself with a challenging political stance on things but honours the sporting heroes in several sports, with little known facts about Motspur Park and Lords Cricket Ground and his involvement with London University.

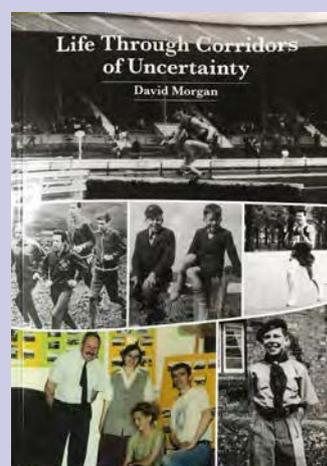
He was head groundsman at Motspur Park, after being a trainee

gardener at Kew, where he started his athletics at 17 years old.

He was head groundsman at Winchmore Cricket Club, a cricket professional at Edinburgh Academy and among other things he taught in Poland from 1994 to 2005.

He joined Thames Valley Harriers in 1962 and became a Welsh International runner. He also won quite a few steeplechases, which included a win in that event in the popular old Fire Brigade meeting, at the White City Stadium.

However, his ‘Life Through Corridors of Uncertainty’ certainly came true on August 26, 1967, when he looked on course to win a 3000m



steeplechase on the old cinder track at Crystal Palace when he put his foot down below the water jump and broke his foot on the clods of earth.

The very next day, his brother died of Hodgkinson’s disease aged only 19.

Like many of us, he has athletics heroes that he knew, such as Fred Bell, the Welsh mile champion of 1969; Ken Norris, the Olympian; and international Mike Wiggs from his club.

This book is unusual but an interesting read to say the least.

■ *Life through Corridors of Uncertainty* by David Morgan, is available from the author at 14 Beaumont Court, Church Stretton, Shropshire SY6 6DT for £9.99 plus £3.50 p&p