

Life ambition to run Three Peaks Race ended in tragedy for man

A life-long ambition to compete in the 23-mile-long Three Peaks Race ended when a 34-year-old runner died during the race an inquest at Skipton was told.

The inquest heard that the man, Mr. Edward Pepper, was last seen alive at a checkpoint on the summit of Ingleborough and his body was found the following day after a search involving about 500 people, including mountain rescue teams, cave rescue organisations and police with tracker dogs.

Claro Coroner, Mr. Miles Coverdale, recorded a misadventure verdict on Edward Michael Harrington Pepper, a chartered accountant, of The Hurst, West Peckham, near Maidstone, Kent, who died while competing in the Three Peaks Race over Whernside, Penyghent and Ingleborough on April 30.

FIRST TIME

Mr. Pepper was a member of Blackheath Harriers and his wife, Margaret, said it had always been his ambition to compete in the Three Peaks Race. This year was the first time his entry had been accepted. He trained regularly and ran 10-20 miles a day and the previous day had run in an international cross country race at Sheffield.

The secretary and treasurer of the Three Peaks Race Association, Mr. Douglas Arthur Croft, said entries were limited to 500 and as far as possible runners without experience were not allowed to take part.

Rules of the AAA said no competitor could receive assistance during the race, and could only give up of his own free will and could not be ordered to retire.

DROPPED

When Mr. Pepper had gone through the Chapel-le-Dale checkpoint he was in 95th position but by the time he had covered the next three miles to the checkpoint on Ingleborough summit he had dropped to 212th position.

By the end of the race, there was no information that Mr. Pepper had retired from the race. Competitors had been allowed six hours to complete the course, and by 5.45 p.m. three quarters of an hour after the end, all the runners had been accounted for except Mr. Pepper.

Mr. Croft said he went to check the changing room at Horton-in-Ribblesdale but there were no items of clothing left there. While he was away a member of the Blackheath Harriers reported that Mr. Pepper was missing and that his car was still on the car park.

SEARCH

Rescue teams at the top of Ingleborough, Horton, and in between searched the area but unsuccessfully. About 500 people were out searching on the next day, Monday, and Mr. Pepper's body was found about lunchtime.

Mr. Stanley Bradshaw, 65, of Paddiham, a member of Clayton-le-Moors Harriers, who has competed in the race for the past 20 years, said the weather conditions were the worst he had ever known in the race. It was cold, with high winds and visibility was down to between ten and 20 yards on the tops.

Mr. Bradshaw said he found Mr. Pepper's body, lying flat on his back with his arms folded across his abdomen.

Mr. Pepper was wearing running shoes, black shorts and a thin fabric anorak which would not have given much protection against the conditions on the Peaks.

Dr. Roger Pyrah, pathologist at Airedale General Hospital, said the cause of death was exhaustion and hypothermia.

The Coroner said that organisers emphasise the need for proper clothing and proper equipment and point out the conditions that can be encountered on the Yorkshire mountains and fells.