

Temporarily On Hold: The Cooper's Hill Cheese Rolling and Wake

Peg Robinson, sold to Gadling.com, completed and submitted March 15, 2010

Due to growing dangers caused by crowds at an already risky event, the popular Gloucestershire Cheese Rolling and Wake, a traditional race event, has been canceled for 2010.



Canceled! The great race has been canceled!

What great race? The 2010 running of the Cooper's Hill Cheese Rolling and Wake!

Yes, I know, a fair lot of you have no idea what I am talking about. Many, though, do, and therein lies the problem...the reason for the cancellation of a great traditional British sporting event...or more accurately, series of events, as the race has come to be four separate events spread out over a single day of downhill foot racing dramatic enough to rate with such classics as the *Charge of the Light Brigade* or the stampede of horses in *The Man From Snowy River*. An occasion once restricted to the population of little Brockworth, Gloucestershire, has become an international phenomenon. As the volume of both hopeful participants and enthusiastic viewers has grown, issues of safety have become more and more severe, and this year the event has been shut down in response to safety concerns.

The Cheese Rolling is an old tradition, known to go back at least 200 years and argued to go much further back, to Roman times. Other towns have cheese rolling events, but no other event is quite like the Brockworth race. Among other reasons, no other race has Cooper's Hill. This long, bitterly steep hill plummets down at a gradient that varies between 1-1 and 1-2. No matter what the source of the event, it long had the hallmarks of an activity designed for a small community. Parking is limited. The race course terminates just short of the back yards of cottages. There is no seating: instead spectators line the sides of the hill, sandwiched between dense stands of trees and the open rough ground the runners will traverse. In these conditions the small numbers expected for a local Bank Holiday event can be easily accommodated: races can be run, beer can be drunk, and while the races themselves are dangerous there are no severe complications.

The event has been growing in size and popularity since the 1970s, when British TV host Dave Allen included the Cheese Rolling in one of his many jaunts to quaint and interesting English localities. As fame has grown, so has the event...and so have the numbers of people arriving to witness it. Over the years difficulties have arisen, among them increased injuries to both runners and spectators. With over 15,000 tourists arriving -- over three times the actual capacity of the site -- it isn't surprising that injuries are mounting and concerns growing about limitations on available medical access for both runners and audience.

Reactions to the 2010 cancellation have been intense. The event draws substantial revenue for local businesses, including local artisan cheese producers. Sportsmen and women counting on a chance to run, spectators with long standing reservations and plans: all are disappointed.

However the organizers are in consultation with authorities and local police to find ways to control the burgeoning situation, concentrating on reducing crowds among other things. Right now the Cheese Rolling and Wake is expected to return in 2011...hopefully a smaller, and more controlled event.