

TT No.71: Keith Aslan - Saturday 23rd December 2017; RUARDEAN HILL RANGERS v Gala Wilton; Gloucester County League; Kick-Off: 14.00; Result: 0-0; Admission & Programme: £2; Attendance: 44 (33 home, 2 away & 9 neutral)

Another excuse to visit one of my favourite parts of the country, today looking resplendent in the winter sunshine making it hard to believe that the last two Saturdays had seen games here postponed due to snow. Ruardean's ground is situated on the highest point of the Forest of Dean, 920 feet above sea level, with magnificent views wherever you look. From the adjacent flagpole you can allegedly see seven counties but I fancy that is a bit of an exaggeration. However, reaching such a high altitude is somewhat stressful without a car and if mountaineering is your bag, the ascent of K2 would be a doddle after you'd done the climb to the ground from the bus stop. The one-mile walk looks easy on the map. It isn't. The aforementioned bus stop has an hourly service from Gloucester, double-deckers, and if you are the other person who pays bus fares, relatively cheap at £5.10p return for what is quite a major journey.

I wouldn't imagine Gloucester County newbies, Ruardean, had any problems with the ground grading committee. Fully railed with an old stand on the half way line an attractive ground in a glorious setting. It has a very welcoming clubhouse with hot drinks available served in Ruardean Hill Rangers FC mugs. They missed a trick here as at least three people wanted to buy one but were told they didn't have enough to sell as people keep nicking them. Not any of the hoppers today though, we are much too nice. Two large platefuls of rolls appeared at half time and while I got in early for my four, when I went back for seconds just before the match resumed, they'd all gone. They're a greedy lot round here. The food prepared for the players post-match banquet looked scrumptious, a club well up in the hospitality league table methinks. One of their officials even gave three of us a lift back into Cinderford after the match where we caught an earlier bus. The kindness of strangers. The club was formed in 1919 with men coming back from the war, but given the carnage and the size of the hamlet, I'm surprised they found enough players to form a team.

Don't be put off by the score, goalless games can be very entertaining and this one was. The Gala goalkeeper was on top form which he needed to be to keep out a barrage of Ruardean attacks, particularly in the second half. Undeterred that he was wearing exactly the same colours, as the home side he got around this by donning a high visibility vest which made him stand out even more. For the second Saturday in succession my game kicked off dead on time, I hope these referees never try to get a job in the Isthmian League, they won't last very long with that sort of time keeping.