

THE YOREDALE 100

BACKGROUND

After completing several road marathons and numerous off-road/trail events of a similar or further distance, this year I was looking for a different challenge. I then noticed that the Long Distance Walker's Association (LDWA) annual 100 miler was in the Yorkshire Dales, an area I knew fairly well, and so decided that this was the new challenge I needed. The 100 itself was to take place over the 24th – 26th May; i.e. the late May Bank Holiday weekend and when I entered in mid February, 500 of the maximum 530 entries had already been received. However, the rules stated that up until the end of March only entrants who had achieved the qualifying level of having completed a 50 mile event over the previous year would be accepted, which I hadn't, and after that entry would be on merit; a nervous wait ensued. Imagine my delight when, in late March, I received confirmation of my acceptance, I now had 9 weeks to train, and then reality set in – WHAT had I done?

Over the following 9 weeks I managed to retrace the whole route over 4 consecutive days at the end of April and also completed 4 other long days out in the hills, including an extended Chevy Chase route but a shortened Allendale Challenge route due to the inclement weather.

THE START

The morning of the big day dawned bright, breezy and not too warm. The majority of competitors started at 9:00am, but I had elected for a 10:00am start due to the checkpoint (CP) opening times (starts at 11:00am and noon were also possible). So at 10:00am I set off from Aireville Park, Skipton with about 40 others. I had decided that as this was my first 100, and that the furthest I had competed in the past was 50 miles, I was going to walk uphill, jog downhill and jog/walk the flat sections so as to try and ensure survival to the finish. However, this first section from Skipton to the CP at Gargrave is along the side of the Leeds to Liverpool canal and is totally flat. My plan to jog/walk meant that by the time the first mile was complete, I was the last of the 10:00am starters, the plan went out of the window and I ran the remaining 4 miles to Gargrave, which I reached in 45 minutes; with another 95 miles to go 9min/miling was probably too fast. After a quick drink of water and a couple of biscuits it was off again, this time

following the Pennine Way, mostly over fields, for nearly 6 mile to the 2nd CP at Kirkby Malham. It was during this section that I met Rachel, a member of Bingley Harriers, who was to become my companion to the finish.

GREEN LANES

After a quick stop for a ham sandwich and a mug of tea it was off to Malham and then to Settle via the first real climb of the day over Kirkby Fell. It was while on this section that we encountered the first of many of the Yorkshire Dales famous green lanes that we were to use during the day. A sumptuous feast of quiche and potato salad followed by rice pudding and fruit and the obligatory mug of tea were quickly consumed at Settle CP. Off again, and after a short climb there was some lovely gradual downhill running on grassy paths to the small hamlet of Feizor, followed by more green lanes through Austwick to the CP at Clapham. Another bowl of rice pudding later and it was off over many stiles and through many gates to Ingleton.



At Ingleton checkpoint

ONWARD AND UPWARD

We decided to have a longer break at Ingleton as the next CP with facilities (Horton-In-Ribblesdale) was 8.5 mile away, and the first half of the section took us over Ingleborough which, at 724m (2375ft in old money), was the highest point of the whole route. We walked Ingleborough at a fast pace with heads bent due to the strong head wind which became increasingly stronger the closer we got to the summit, until eventually on the summit plateau we could hardly stand up. It was a quick hello and goodbye to the suffering CP staff, (who were to be there for over 8 hours – how would these

events survive without these incredible volunteers?), and down the obvious path to Horton-In-Ribblesdale.



Approaching Horton

THE PENNINE WAY

Here, the Mid Wales and Marches group of the LDWA really looked after us, with leek soup, ravioli, and apple crumble and custard. Again a longish rest as the next section, at 9 mile, was the longest of all and although all on the Pennine Way and hence easy to follow was also virtually entirely uphill. Good progress was made on the first climb out of Horton up to the isolated farmhouse at Old Ing, which was followed by a short descent before the long drag via Cam End to Kidhow Gate. This section of the PW has recently been resurfaced, a vast improvement on the deeply rutted, wet, boggy path which existed before, but unfortunately was head first into the now gale force wind. As dusk fell, the welcoming lights of the CP could be seen, but it seemed like an eternity before we finally reached them. Into the exceedingly hot tent for a mug of tea and hot dogs and straight back out into the howling gale, this was the only 'why I am doing this' spell I had, as after the warmth of the tent, I suddenly got the shivers, so it was off down the track to Hawes as quickly as possible to lose height and hence get out of the wind. Also with darkness fast approaching we wanted to reach Hawes (and half-way) before it became really dark. We just about made it, reaching the CP at 10:55pm; just over half-way in a little under 13 hours, much quicker than I had anticipated beforehand. A quick wash in the school, and a change of shirt and leggings, but as my feet felt fine I was reluctant to change socks and shoes, which remained firmly in place. I avoided the full English breakfast on offer, instead having

porridge and toast. After a lengthy break of 40 minutes, I again felt fine, the shivers had gone and I was raring to continue.

NAVIGATING AT NIGHT

At this stage, myself and Rachel were joined by Tony, a veteran of 13 previous hundreds and as we headed down the main street at Hawes we were greeted with shouts of encouragement from the late night revellers outside the pubs. Soon it was head torches on and through the fields to Sedbusk, onto the dismantled railway line which took us to Yoredale Bridge at Bainbridge and a short 400yds of road to CP10. A quick drink and yet another bowl of rice pudding, then the short distance to Stalling Busk via Semer Water.

This was the section that I had thought would be the hardest to navigate, as although on footpaths, they are not well used and difficult to follow at night with only the light from a head torch to show the way. However, the three of us worked well together, with me reading the route description, Rachel taking the bearings on her compass and Tony shining his torch in the direction we needed to travel. Obviously slower than in daylight we nevertheless made decent progress to the next CP. Here we were to see the first walkers we had met since leaving Hawes, both of them slumped over tables fast asleep in front of a roaring log fire. We left quickly in case the soporific effect of the hall affected us as well! From here the route took a long gradual ascent over Stake Moss on High Lane and Gilbert Lane (two old drover's roads), followed by a steep descent down Buckden Rake. As we reached CP12 at Buckden dawn was just breaking, the night section was over and 2/3rds of the route was complete. We were fed cheesy oat cakes by the Staffordshire Group, apparently a Staffs delicacy – absolutely delicious – but by now I was so full I could only manage one of them.

THE DALES WAY

The next 25 mile was predominantly along the Dales Way, with all but 5 mile next to the River Wharfe. The going was good and we progressed at a brisk walk/steady jog, constantly passing people who had obviously started much to fast. Kettlewell (CP), Grassington, Linton (CP), Burnsall, Appletreewick (CP), Barden Bridge, the fantastic grounds and buildings of Bolton Abbey, and Bolton Bridge (CP) quickly

came and went until we finally left the Dales Way at Addingham (CP). At all of these CP's it was just a couple of minutes for a drink of water and bite of chocolate.

ALMOST THERE

We all still felt quite strong, (relatively speaking after 93 mile), and set off from Addingham, initially through the town and then onto the track known locally as 'The Roman Road', which led directly to the outskirts of Skipton, passing through the last CP at Draughton Moor in the process. We ran down into Skipton, (passing a group of five who had passed us a few miles earlier), through the town centre, getting a few strange glances from the Sunday shoppers and onto the canal tow path. We were determined to keep the group of five behind us, so we kept up a steady pace on the tow path and as we crossed over the canal into Aireville Park, we were met by my wife Sue, who shouted encouragement and took a couple of photos. The final uphill of the day through the park and into the finish at the school.

A shower and change of clothes, the final food of the event, a chat with other finishers, collection of polo shirt, badge and certificate, and it was all over with only one blister to complain about.

For the record, I finished 31st in a time of 27hrs 36mins, the winner's time being 21hrs 45mins. Finally, my thanks to Rachel and Tony for their company and support, and to all the helpers, marshals, checkpoint staff etc. who put on such a fantastically organised event.



Tony, Rachel and me at the finish

Steve Walker