

## **Joss Naylor Lakeland Challenge: the old man's Bob Graham Round?**

***5<sup>th</sup> May 2012. Paul Hainsworth***

I will NEVER win a fell race. I am unlikely to come in the top 33% in a Lakeland race. I don't even feature in the Vets rankings. BUT, I am the first Northumberland Fell Runner to do a "Joss" in less than 12 hours! Not that I approve of blowing one's own trumpet, quite the reverse. I feel very privileged to have the health and freedom from injury to still be running long mountain challenges at 54: and very privileged to have such fantastic fell-running friends in support.

The Joss Naylor Lakeland Challenge is 21 years old. Joss set the bar at the age of 54, completing the point to point course from Pooley Bridge to Greendale Bridge, Wasdale in atrocious weather with strong South West winds and in a time of 11h 30m. Run for charity, the current standards are 12 hours for men aged 50-54, 15 hours for 55-59 and so forth up to 24 hours. Forty-eight miles (possibly an over-estimate), 17,000 feet of ascent (verified) and 30 summits in 11 hours 24 minutes for a mid-pack runner like me, never. But on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2012 my wildest aspirations came true.

We have just had the wettest April this Century. I expected the ground to be water-logged and the going tough. We'd been hedging our bets all week with a succession of Atlantic lows rolling in. But the wind backed North-East. Parked up beside Ullswater on Friday night, there was a clear artic chill with brilliant stars and a hard frost in the morning.

The first leg from the centre of the Bridge at Pooley along the High Street ridge to Kirkstone Pass was firm with frozen turf. There had been a number of last minute changes to the pacers. John Duff juggled manfully and single-handedly the timing sheets, water bottles, discarded clothes and a camera, with good humour. We couldn't believe our good fortune to be up in the hills alone: we picked out Fairfield, Helvellyn and Great Gable poking through. What a day! It was good to see 'Relay- Dave' Atkinson back from injury, shadowing from behind but making up for it by demolishing a healthy helping of pacers' sandwiches.



***Fairfield, Helvellyn with Great Gable poking through (photo John Duff)***

I first had a very speculative stab at the “Joss” in October 2011. I knew I wasn’t really able to sustain the pace required despite competing in many long ‘A’ fell races over the summer. We experienced temperatures in the 20’s with extreme humidity and I suffered badly on Leg Three. I managed 12h 14m and thought for the first time, may be this is achievable with more specific preparation. I decided the key was those big long days out in the fells well known to ‘Bob-Grahamers’. It would take focussed training at a pace faster than I was used to. I needed swift pacers who could double back and forth for all my needs, and favourable conditions. I would navigate myself and only ask for pacers to correct any obvious errors, particularly if visibility was poor.



***Kirkstone Pass: Dexter 'at your service', Steph, Paul (photo John Duff)***

Well it all came together. We progressively shaved off a minute or two here and there, picked a good line down from Pike How and hit Kirkstone Pass car park 12 minutes up. Steph Scott in preparation for her own BGR and Dexter provided brilliant refuelling support. John Telfer and Paul Appleby accompanied me around Leg 2 over Red Screes, Hart Crag, Fairfield and Seat Sandal to Dunmail Raise. Paul and John were perfect – steady and solid. We had shaved a bit more time off the Schedule. It was a pleasant surprise to renew acquaintance with 'JNLC- veteran' John Lagoe who'd been at Dunmail raise in October and returned for my success.

Leg 3 was my *bête noire*. Not that I disliked the terrain: it is great scenery. But I had bad memories of being way-off the pace during my October attempt. Peter Moralee and I had conversed during that attempt about what could be run and what was impossible to run. Could one really run up to High Raise (the second hill by this name on the challenge)? Looking at some of the schedules, this seemed to be the only way to make the splits – yet the terrain is rising, tussocky and to my mind energy sapping. I'd been back to Leg 3 several times in training, working out best lines: how to shave off 5 minutes here and there. I'd set a schedule based on my best recce times when I was fresh. But how was I going to match that with two legs already behind me?





***Ascending Steel Fell: Scott Gibson, Tom Reeves, Paul, Peter Moralee (photo John Duff)***

There were patches of boggy ground but the running was good and the lines near perfect: Scott Gibson picked the best up Bow Fell. Psychologist Tom Reeves didn't need to say much but there was no negativity. Around Bow Fell, I sensed he had decided I was going to make it: he was in the right profession to accompany me on this leg! I still thought there was a frighteningly long way to go at pace. One of the trickiest descents is down The Band off Great End. I had been down there six different ways on six occasions. I now know the best way if anyone else wants to rise to the challenge.

Waiting at Styhead, the great man himself was apparently the first to spot us on the skyline. Seventy-six years hadn't dulled the shepherd's eyes for lost sheep on top of a crag. Magic words then to hear Joss say at Styhead, "you're looking good, Paul. You've got it in the bag". Nausea was creeping in as Steph stuffed a ham sandwich in my hand. Joss' comment: "you should be having that on top of Gable" which I'm sure is right. Now twenty-six minutes up but starting to wilt, could I hold it together?



***Joss and Paul at the stretcher box, Styhead Pass (Photo Steph Scott)***

With a brief pause and Geoff Davis' and David (Dexter) Armstrong's fresh legs, we steadily regained height on Great Gable. A few gentle snowflakes appeared. I'd run in a short merino wool tee-shirt all day and the fresh chill was a welcome antidote to the warmth in the sun, despite the temperature being close to freezing all day.

We bombed off Gable but I hit my first bad patch going up Kirk Fell. I was expecting bad spells – I'm well used to them on long events. We were still hitting our splits. Our pace uphill seemed painfully slow but the descents fast and I knew I had a half hour cushion by now. This was the pattern to come for every hill now: slow plod uphill, fight nausea, knew I needed energy, not sure how to get it on board, half a gel – felt pukey – wait five minutes – have the rest, hope I can keep it down. At least there's another descent, fantastic late afternoon light and chill to the air. What a joy to be out. I knew I was capable of getting round but I was still doing the sums and demanding of Dexter instantaneous split times. He even fibbed when I was a minute down on a split that I was on schedule – is he a better psychologist than Tom!

Geoff found the bearings off Haycock and picked up the long scree run with precision, but getting the stones out of my shoes cost minutes. When Dexter tried to quicken my pace up Seatallan, I politely invited him to go and speak to Geoff a few yards ahead. I knew I couldn't go any faster but the top would come eventually. Seatallan is a beast and easy to underestimate, Middle Fell more drawn out and gentle – and then we were there on the last top with time in hand. John Duff popped up to take photos as we headed down.





***Dexter, Geoff and Paul leaving the last top (photo John Duff)***

Joss' place came into view at the foot of a steep descent. We could have stuck to the path but hey – we're fell-runners – so it was off on the rough to cut the corner and get a few more bruises. Geoff asked, "Why are you doing this to yourself at the end of a run like this?" Greendale and a large party were on the bridge. Another contender had just scraped in three minutes under 12 hours. He was the second this year and I the third. Joss was there again and later David Powell –Thompson, of Striding Edge Productions fame, rolled out of the pub to congratulate us. I thanked Joss for inspiring this challenge and he commented that it's good for 'young lads like you'. Fifty-four and young – in spirit at any rate!



***Greendale Bridge: Dexter, Geoff, 'Iron' Joss and Paul (Photo John Duff)***

### ***Timings & Pacers: May 5<sup>th</sup> 2012***

	<b>Schedule</b>	<b>Actual time</b>	<b>Pacers</b>
Pooley Bridge	08:00	08:00	John Duff
Arrive Kirkstone Pass	10:46	10:34	Paul Appleby, John Telfer
Arrive Dunmail Raise	12:41	12:27	Scott Gibson, Tom Reeves
Arrive Styhead Pass	16:10	15:44	Geoff Davis, David Armstrong
Greendale Bridge	19:54	19:24	
<i>Road support</i>			<i>Steph Scott, David Armstrong</i>

Money was raised for The People's Kitchen, which provides food, clothing and friendship for 650 disadvantaged people a week in Newcastle. This a transparent organisation, staffed by volunteers (including NFR stalwart John Dallinson) where donations go where they should, and was hence my choice.

I am totally in debt to the fantastic folk mentioned above who helped me get round this challenge on the day and joined me on long training days. It was a pleasure to meet Mary Naylor at the end of my October attempt. I am of course indebted to Mr Naylor himself who has now inspired several generations of fell-runners and was a tremendous boost to me on the day – your good health Sir!