

## Susan's JNLC Account – 23/05/2015, W55, 16 Hour Time Limit.



photo: Kevin Bray

### **Intro & Background**

The Joss Naylor Lakeland Challenge (JNLC) is a self organised mountain challenge for veteran fell runners over 50. The time allowed increases with age (I had 16 hours) and runners must be accompanied over the route and raise at least £100 for charity. The course crosses the Lake District from Pooley Bridge, in the north east, to Joss' home at Greendale, Wasdale in the south west – a distance of around 48 miles involving 17,000' of ascent over 30 Lakeland peaks including High Street, Fairfield, Bow Fell, Great End, Great Gable, Pillar and Seatallan. Only two women in the V55 category had completed the JNLC prior to my attempt.

For those who don't know, Joss Naylor is probably England's best known fell runner. He has lived all his life in the Lake District valley of Wasdale where he worked as a sheep farmer / shepherd until his retirement. Joss is well into his 70s now but still does some amazing runs and held many very impressive fell running records and was victorious in many, many very tough fell races. Chris Brasher (Olympic gold medallist and organiser of the London Marathon) described Joss as "*the greatest of them all*", having "*sinews stronger than any man made substance and a will harder than a diamond.....the toughest runner in Britain*".

## My JNLC Day

### Leg 1- 'Cuckoos, Larks and Deer' (Pooley Bridge to Kirkstone Pass)

Geoff and I left our friends house in Bothel at 4.30am and collected Juliet Percival (leg 1 pacer) en route to Pooley Bridge. The rest of my team, Paul Hainsworth (navigator) plus pacers Allon Welsh and Mike Hughes had already assembled in the square on our arrival. My clothes, food and drink were distributed and so we made our way on to the bridge, a few photos were taken and Geoff gave us a ten second countdown. We are off at 5.30am on a beautiful morning.



The pace was brisk due to a combination of nerves and excitement as I just could not wait to be on the fells. The morning and the weather were wonderful; bright sun and a cool but gentle breeze with the sound of cuckoos calling. Paul surged ahead as we made our way to the first summit. I was aware that I was probably going a bit too fast and Mike & Allon did a fine job of steadying the pace a little. We ran on with lark song ringing out over the fells, the heavy dew on the grass glistened and sparkled like diamonds and we could see for miles as the tops came and went with relative ease. A lone deer stood to greet me on High Raise and this was followed by Jules exclaiming "check out the view to your left" as we headed towards Kidsty Pike and enjoyed a wonderful panorama.

A further herd of deer scampered off High Street as we approached. It just felt great to be alive and my heart was full of joy. I knew there would be tough times during the day ahead but I was 'in the moment' and feeling good. In what seemed like no time at all we were ticking off the last three summits of leg 1 and speeding down to

Kirkstone Pass to be greeted by a large group of my support crew with beaming smiles, arriving 27 minutes up on schedule!

5 minutes to rest and re-fuel.

## **Leg 2 – ‘Buoyant Banter’ (Kirkstone Pass to Dunmail Raise)**



Climb Towards Hart Crag – photo: Kevin Bray

Accompanying me on leg 2 were Kevin Bray (navigator, Morpeth Harriers) with pacers: Mandy Dawson, Nigel Heppell, Mike Bennett and Dave Gibson all being members of Elvet Striders my cross country club.

And so for leg 2, or day 2 as it was for me because, as part of my mental coping strategy, I was treating each leg as a new day! The sun was still bright and I don't usually react very well to the heat so thankfully, the breeze was still cool. I knew that Kevin would steady the pace on this leg having discussed with him on earlier reces that the challenge only really begins after Dunmail, and going too fast on the early legs can scupper your chances of success.

As I headed up Red Screes Dave passed on good luck wishes from his children Sam and Freya both of whom run with Durham Harriers. Dave had kindly given my brother Stan a lift over to be part of the day which had only been arranged a couple of days before. He was there to greet me part way up Red Screes and a brief stop for a hug and a kiss sent me on my way upwards and onwards.

The pacers kept a more or less constant stream of banter going and topics covered included rescue battery hens, Nigel's idea of a pamper day for his wife Lesley (an open water swimming course at Rydal Water), plans for hot showers and tea shops later on, the various fell challenges already done and those still on people's wish lists. Kevin regularly checked I was OK and my band of pacers tended to all my needs efficiently and patiently.

The views were amazing on all sides but the temperature was rising and a change of clothes was needed 'on the move' whilst heading to Hart Crag. My Dru yoga teacher was running a yoga retreat at Grasmere that day so, whilst I was on the fells, the yoga group were working on relevant posture and positive affirmations to help me on my challenge!

There are only four summits on this leg and three were ticked off without incident. Suddenly, as I started ascending Seat Sandal, cramp took hold of my right hamstring. I hit the deck clutching my leg and cursing as I am rarely troubled with cramp. Kevin came to the rescue and, as I lay on my back, he stretched my leg and the cramp was soon gone. I adopted a gentler pace for the rest of this ascent with drink in hand and munching some salted nuts.

As I started the run down to Dunmail I was a little tentative as I did not want the cramp to return. On reaching the bottom unscathed, I was again greeted by my amazing and happy support team who were joined by Monica Shone and Mike Langrish as the JNLC 'meet and greet' representatives. I arrived 34 minutes ahead of schedule.

I had 10 minutes to refuel and provoked a frantic scurry for extra sunscreen. The cramp had been a timely reminder that the sun was intense but deceptive, as it was eased by a cool breeze. Although I didn't feel particularly hot I knew I would still have been using and losing a lot of fluid. I was pleased to be in the shade at this stop - provided by Mike Hughes holding an umbrella!

### **Leg 3 – 'The Leg of Gentlemen' (Dunmail Raise to Sty Head)**

Joining me on leg 3 were John Telfer (navigator) and pacers Scott Gibson, Paul Appleby (Northumberland Fell Runners), Paul Evans (Elvet Striders) and Kevin Bray who had decided to continue to the very end!

I had not enjoyed the times that I had recced this section as it involves a stiff climb up Steel Fell and a long march to the next two summits. No time for negative thoughts though as this was 'a new day' and I was still feeling strong. A steady pace was set and my brother again appeared part way up the fell, but there was no time for hugs and kisses this time as I needed to keep the momentum going to the top of Steel Fell.



photo: Kevin Bray

My team told me I had done fine on the climb and so we pushed on. John went ahead to find the best lines while Paul A, with my food and drink, was always close to hand. Paul Evans, enjoying a break from his day job as a GP, kept an ever watchful and caring eye on me. It was great listening to the guys on this leg getting to know Paul E - again reflecting on past runs and future goals. Paul A had met my Lakeland friend Raymond Wren at Dunmail and was amazed to learn that Raymond and his OMM partner will compete in their 25<sup>th</sup> successive OMM later this year. Great stuff as Raymond is 69 and his partner, Chris Lattes is 75! Inspirational chat indeed made the time pass quicker than expected to High Raise. I enjoyed talking to Scott who will soon attempt the BGR. Indirectly this led to Scott realising that Geoff (my husband) and I have nick names for many of our friends. He wondered what his would be. Well I have christened you "the gentle giant" Scott!

We went into Springwatch mode when Paul A mentioned he had spotted a meadow pipit's nest with five eggs close by here the week before whilst running the Old County Tops race. Today we settled for finding a toad and I stopped to say hello. I thought about a kiss, to see if he would turn into a prince, but thought 'who needs a prince when I already have five knights of the fells with me'.

On we strode to Rossett Pike. On arrival I checked that I still had time on my side and stopped briefly to eat. I had struggled going up Bowfell a couple of times when

reccying so wanted to get a bit more food and drink on board. This allowed us all to enjoy the scenery and the slabs on Bowfell were shining in the brilliant sunlight. I felt very humble as we started the ascent of Bowfell. From the start of the day I had been surrounded by so much love and affection I realised just how lucky I am to have such wonderful family and friends.



photo: Kevin Bray

Good humoured banter saw me up to the summit whilst enjoying some brief shade from the sun which for me was a pleasant change. I was, however, now being troubled by some discomfort from my right heel. So, after checking the time, I decided it was shoes off on the summit to remove the compeed which was no longer doing its job. A dollop of Vaseline was supplied by my personal medic Paul E and I was hand fed assorted nuts by Paul A as I replaced my shoes and we were soon on our way.

Polite walkers vacated the summit of Esk Pike on my arrival but I hit a low ebb as I ascended Great End. My legs slowed and a massive wave of nausea washed over me. I knew that this was my body saying it needed more fuel so a brief pause, a drink and a couple of extra strong mints saw me to the top.

Scott is a good rock climber and he just loves rocks beneath his feet, which he just glides over, and here we were on rocky ground. The plan was to follow the 'master', embrace the rocks and make them my friends. With the 'gentle giant' just a step or

two ahead, and the rest of the team close to hand, the plan worked a treat. However, I scored highly on the bad language scale on the difficult descent from Great End which involved a couple of 'five points of contact' moves! Nonetheless we all got down in one piece and finished with a gentle trot to Styhead.

I had a slightly smaller support team here but they were no less enthusiastic. With five minutes scheduled to refuel I was advised that I still had time in hand but I hurriedly ate and drank what I could manage and changed my socks. I said farewell to Paul A at this point but John T and Scott decided to carry on for one further top.

#### **Leg 4 – 'The Final Push' (Styhead to Greendale Bridge)**

For the final leg I was joined by my husband Geoff Davis who had been seeing to my every need at all the road crossings. He would now act as navigator and would be assisted by pacers Peter Reed, Peter Moralee and Steph Scott (all NFR). Kevin Bray and Paul Evans, having enjoyed themselves way too much, decided to continue on for the final push to Greendale.

I adopted a new coping strategy for this leg; just taking one summit at a time and keeping a steady pace. My legs felt heavy now but I was determined to keep on Geoff's heels and I just about managed this with the top of Gable arriving sooner than I expected. Geoff started the descent a bit too quick for me as, on reflection at this stage, he was probably more nervous than me and knew just how much completing the challenge in less than 16 hours would mean to me. Although I had said that even a few seconds in-side the cut off time would be enough, Geoff knows me better than that, and was aware that, at the top of Gable, there is still a fair bit to do before Greendale Bridge.

The weather was still fabulous with views to die for as we pushed ever onwards. Peter Reed and Peter Moralee were enjoying good weather for once, the latter having done numerous challenges in the lakes over the years and is more used with being soaked to the skin and cold!

The nausea returned while ascending Kirk Fell but Steph assured me that I was going faster than I thought and so I plodded on. It was easier to take in the wonderful Lakeland scenery at the pace I was going and, once again, I settled into just listening to the pacers' banter. With their encouraging words it felt great to be on the fells on this special day. I asked for a time check at the top of Pillar and, still well ahead of schedule, I decided a short stop would do me some good. I knew I should eat and a satsuma, peeled by Paul, went down a treat. Feeling refreshed by the short stop the next two tops, Scoat Fell and Steeple, went over quite easily.



It was a grind up Haycock with Geoff forging ahead to drive me on and I got it into my head that I was losing too much time. My spirits took a dive and I muttered to Steph that it was like being on holiday in the Highlands with Geoff being 100 yards in front! I was also conscious of the climb that still awaited me on Seatallan. Peter M offered me an apple crumble and custard gel assuring me that it would taste good. I could not be persuaded however, but did agree to drink coke which I hate. Peter R's Kendal Mint Cake was quite enjoyable but I could almost feel my teeth being rotted away by the sugar so decided not to have anymore.

Geoff located the scree descent off Haycock and I asked for a bit of space around me on this steep slope. However, with relative ease I was down in no time at all accompanied by laughter, the rush of moving scree and the odd clatter of rocks as others descended behind me. Apparently, Steph and Kevin were creating some new dance moves ready for 'Strictly' this autumn - so BBC, they are waiting for your call! We all emptied stones from our shoes, with further merriment, before pushing on.





photo: Kevin Bray

On starting the ascent of Seatallan I had not gone far when I realised all was not well. I have suffered from heat stroke a number of times in the past and it results in me passing out, so I knew what could be on the cards. I told the others I did not feel well and needed to stop. Apparently, according to Kevin, even my freckles went white at this point!

I leant on my walking poles to compose myself. I thought of my Mum and Dad, in whose memory I was dedicating this challenge. I chatted to them both, in my head, as I often do in times of need and was inspired by my Dad's words - which he used to say to encourage me when I was little: "slow but sure gets there in the end".

This was all the encouragement I needed to carry on to the finish so, with my pacers close by and a drink in hand I set off again. It was great to reach the top of Seatallan with just one fell to go. Although the climb up Middle Fell is gentle I could only go up very slowly. Near the summit I was greeted by Mike Hughes and his daughter Sally which greatly lifted my spirits. I had a further surprise when my brother Stan appeared who I had expected to be back in Durham and not on the top of Middle Fell! This final summit provided one of the best views of the day with the Wastwater Screens reflected in the giant mirror of lake itself.



Middle Fell - photo: Mike Hughes

Although, with my sore feet, I could only manage a slow trot off Middle Fell I knew I had plenty of time so spirits were high. I could see and hear my supporters at the bottom waiting to greet me and I was met by cheers, applause and happy smiling faces as I managed the final run onto Greendale Bridge. Joss was also there to meet me, having left a sixtieth birthday party in order to offer me his congratulations, so it was a perfect end to a perfect day finishing in 15 hours 32 minutes.



Finally, my heartfelt thanks to my support team on the day which, in addition to those already mentioned, included Valerie Atkinson, Linda Bray, Wendy Appleby, Heather Hughes and her brother Andy.

The day was a great success as a result of a group of people I am blessed and honoured to have as friends working together as team. Their skills and knowledge of the fells were shared throughout the day in an atmosphere of mutual respect and admiration.

A special thanks to my loving husband Geoff who encouraged me to have the confidence to undertake the challenge.

### **Susan Davis (Northumberland Fell Runners / Elvet Striders)**

Details of Susan's times [here](#):

More photos from Kevin Bray [here](#):