

**Geoff Davis MV65 (Elvet Striders/Northumberland Fell Runners)**

**Joss Naylor Lakeland Challenge, Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2022.**

**(Membership No 137 – previous crossings 17.06.2012 & 02.09.2017)**



The Joss Naylor Lakeland Challenge (JNLC) was set up by the veteran fell runner himself in 1990. It is a self organised, anytime mountain challenge for fell runners over 50. So there are no race directors, no exorbitant entry fees, no way markers, mile markers or fellow competitors. The route crosses the Lake District from Pooley Bridge, on Ullswater, to Joss's former home at Greendale in Wasdale – a distance of around 48 miles involving 17,000' of ascent across 30 Lakeland peaks including High Street, Fairfield, Bow Fell, Great End, Great Gable, Pillar and Steeple. It is known as 'the old man's Bob Graham' and a trail run it is not! Those attempting the crossing must be accompanied over the route and the time allowed increases with age. At age 65 I had 24 hours.

This was to be my third crossing of the JNLC and was to take place on my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. I had prepared thoroughly with lots of long days out over the Lakeland fells and Scottish hills either with Susan, or on my own or accompanied by fell friends most of whom would be helping on the day.



The forecast was for 40mph gusts on the tops with scattered showers throughout the day. In Pooley at 5am it was fairly calm but cloudy. Nick Latham, Aaron Gourley, John Tollitt and I set off bang on time and the south westerly wind was soon in our faces as we climbed onto the open fell. The cloud started to break though and my spirits lifted as we began to make up time across the grassy tops. Apart from my small band of pacers we saw no one else on the fells across this leg. But we did have the company of red deer and they were a very welcome sight. Feeling fresh and fit this leg troubled me very little and we arrived at Kirkstone thirty minutes ahead of the 17 hour schedule I was using.



I rested for five minutes at Kirkstone with Susan, Steph Scott, Tom Reeves, Stan White & David James there to greet me. The second leg was a joy as the long climbs up Red Screes, Hart Crag and Seat Sandal were easily accomplished in what was a brisk wind but under a dry, bright sky. My all female team of pacers (Penny Browell, Nina Mason & Dawn Hoskin) were happy and chatty and time passed quickly although Dawn took a tumble coming off Fairfield and bruised her arm, although she never told me until the following day. The fells were still quiet with just one or two walkers encountered across Fairfield and Seat Sandal. I still felt it was early days and we received a warning of things to come with a brief, heavy shower on the descent to Dunmail where we arrived 51 minutes ahead of schedule.







It was great to see so many supporters at Dunmail but I resisted the temptation to linger for more than the allotted 10 minutes and was soon toiling up the steep slope of Steel Fell with James Garland, Stuart Scott & Mark Davinson. This was accomplished fairly easily but I started to suffer on the long trudge across to High Raise. The steep, wet pathless section was hard, as was the final less steep but boggy rise to the summit and my spirits were at a low ebb. They picked up on the descent towards Sticks Pass and I felt fine on the climb to Rossett Pike. It was still windy and we could see the dark clag moving towards us from the Conistown fells. The rising traverse up Bow Fell felt steep but was over fairly quickly and I even found the time to discuss the quality of 'Outdry' jackets with a passing fell runner. As we reached the plateau of Bow Fell's top the clag descended and the rain began to fall. If this crossing was a tale of two halves then the whistle had just blown for the start of the second half.



From now on the wind was joined by thick mist, heavy prolonged showers and wet rock underfoot. Along with growing fatigue these started to slow my progress and a particularly heavy downpour after

Esk Pike saw me stop to don full waterproofs with the assistance of Stuart and Mark who, to my concern, were still just wearing shorts! Things were particularly desperate on Great End and I considered opting for a longer, easier descent to Sty Head. However, having been across these rocks so many times I had the confidence to stick with the steep rocky route, albeit very carefully, arriving an hour and five minutes ahead of schedule at Sty Head.



Again I had a posse of supporters here, including Ian Butler, Heather Raistrick, Valerie & Jonathan all clad in full waterproofs seeking what little shelter there was around the stretcher box. Susan opened up an emergency shelter and I spent the next 16 minutes beneath it trying to eat and drink what I could. Donning a third jacket I set off up Great Gable with my new team of pacers: John Duff, Elaine Bisson and Chris Little. Elaine doesn't have the monopoly on the use of bad language and I cursed the weather, the wet rocks, the awkward moves, horrid gels and anything else that didn't happen to suit me at the time. The next three climbs were very tough but the descents over wet slippery rocks on tired legs and sore knees were particularly challenging. Nonetheless, they were all accomplished and I started to count down the remaining fells as the end approached. Haycock was climbed without stopping and we chose to omit the usual scree descent opting for a grassy path instead. Taking Joss's advice I kept my head down climbing the nightmare hill that is Seatallan, and with only Middle Fell remaining I was almost happy again. After the quickest descent I could manage on shredded legs we arrived at Greendale Bridge to be greeted by Susan and Fiona Brannan. All done in 15 hours 47 minutes, over eight hours inside the time limit! An incredibly tough day and I wouldn't have missed for the world. Standing on the bridge I felt incredibly grateful to all those who had helped me and just a little bit proud of myself. They say that age is just a number but when you have a big number against your name achievements like this taste that bit sweeter.



