

**NAV4 Dawn to Dusk – c 57 miles & c 13,000 feet of ascent  
June 23, 2012**

**Askham – Moor Divock – Howtown – Martindale Hause – Sandwich – Patterdale –  
Grisedale Tarn – Wythburn – High Raise – Stake Pass – Langstrath Valley –  
Watendlath – Blea Tarn – Wythburn – Helvellyn – Patterdale – Boredale Hause –  
Martindale Hause – Howtown – Moor Divock – Askham**



Happy and dried out "Dawn to Duskers" – L to r – Andy, Mark, JT, Race Organiser Joe & Fi (with her tea)

Inspired by the recent long distance successes of Steph and Geoff which I had been privileged to witness at first hand I headed south of the border to try my hand at a long day out in Lakeland.

The inaugural running of the NAV4 Adventure (prop : Joe Faulkner) Dawn to Dusk took place on what must have been the wettest Summer solstice weekend in living memory. Whatever cliché you apply to a lot of rain would not have done justice to what this part of Cumbria experienced in the run up to and during this great event. However, as my father is fond of saying "it all adds to the fun and games" although at various points of the day it was hard to determine what exactly the fun element was.

With over 55 miles of trail, fell and open pathless moorland and bog to cover and around 13,000 feet of ascent thrown in there was something for everybody. Although the route only visited two summits (High Raise & Helvellyn) it proved a salutary lesson that you don't need to be summit-bagging to experience some very steep climbing. This was a wonderfully low-key event which should do nothing to distract from the excellent organisation and support throughout and was hugely appreciated. To cater for all degrees of masochism Joe had also arranged a Summer Tour de Helvellyn for those only wanting to get semi, rather than fully, drowned.

As ever the distance and height gained only formed part of the story, being as much a journey of the mind and spirit as it was one dependent on the willingness of your legs. This is the story of my journey.

The 3.30am rendezvous with my alarm clock was reached through what seemed like no more than an intermittent doze due to the rain and wind that had been lashing at the window. Every so often this sound would die down to allow my semi-conscious mind to believe the storm had passed and that now "all would be well" only for it to reappear several minutes later with an even greater ferocity.

Driving the short distance to Askham Village Hall shortly after 4am along roads littered with tree debris I was half hoping, half fearing that the venture would not proceed. However, as if by magic, come my nominated start time of 5am the rain eased off and apart from the odd shower would stay that way until just after Patterdale.

After a mile or so on road and track out of Askham the wide expanse of moorland of Moor Divock opens up as I went in search of the first checkpoint known as The Cockpit, a stone circle. You have thought given the reasonably flat terrain such a prominent feature would be easily spotted. However, with a profusion of paths, a set of gorse bushes also arranged in a loose circle and a group of sheep playing an early morning game of "ring a ring o' roses" I managed to make a complete mess of finding this checkpoint, even after resorting to map and compass!

Despite this highly inauspicious start the checkpoint was finally located (just where the map said it should be – funny that) and with my card punched I was able to settle down to an easy run downhill to Howtown just following the newly formed stream which was using the path as the route of least resistance. Passing beneath the furious cascades of Swarthbeck Gill, bore testament, if indeed any were needed, to the volume of rain which had fallen over the past 24 hours, fascination and fear fused as one.

Despite slightly overshooting the path to Martindale just below Steel Knotts I found the second checkpoint at the entrance to St Peter's Church around 6.15am and then managed to find a path, which cut out a section of road and saved me some distance into the bargain. A small pat on the back to partially make up for the utter horrors I had made back up on Moor Divock.

The crossing of the Howegrain Beck, the amalgamation of the Bannerdale and Rampgills Beck, thankfully by a sturdy enough wooden bridge, reinforced the fact there would be no easy wading across watercourses today. Near Sandwick I skillfully managed to find the turning to Patterdale (the large arrow shaped wooden signpost marked "Patterdale" merely confirming what I had already worked out for myself) leading to the third punch located by the thundering Scalehow Beck.

The highlight of the run alongside Ullswater to Patterdale was coming face to face with a rather large red deer it being a close run thing as to who got the bigger

surprise. However, no prizes for guessing who was running the faster. Coming into Patterdale I was spot on in my navigation in finding my way between farm buildings. My delight however was short lived as this led into a field which was now about 3 feet under water as the Goldrill Beck had burst its banks. This necessitated a two-field detour strategy to find a road which eventually took me past The White Lion (sadly closed at 7.30am) to rendezvous with Joe at the first manned checkpoint.

It was now time to up the ante as I headed out of Patterdale and up into Grisedale and the big fells. A more menacing and sombre note was struck as right on cue the heavens opened and the wind began to whip up a storm. At least I was glad I had taken the decision to don every bit of water and windproof article of clothing I possessed at the outset knowing that something like this would come along sooner or later.

In planning my route I had devised a cunning plan to take me to Wythburn by an ascent over Nethermost Pike, thus effectively cutting off a very large corner that the Grisedale Tarn route requires, albeit at the expense of an extra 1,000 feet of climb. Although the visibility still remained reasonably good the fact that I was being buffeted by the winds on the valley floor suggested that it would be significantly worse higher up. So discretion being the better part of valour (or as a result of sheer cowardice) I stuck to the Grisedale path, which was now giving a good imitation of the nearby Grisedale Beck.

The higher I climbed the more foul and unpleasant the weather became leaving me no option but to keep my head down and head on past the climbing lodge at Ruthwaite Lodge up to the tarn.

The absolute nadir of the morning's weather was saved for the open plateau around the tarn. Hardly daring to raise my head from the ground I managed to seek and find the relative sanctuary of the gully alongside Raise Beck and set sail (literally) for Dunmail. However, the proximity of the path to the beck, or in some places, actually now in the beck, sharpened the senses in order to avoid a slip or a trip to the right.

It was with some relief to find a bit of calm in the forest prior to descending to the next checkpoint and meet up with Joe at Wythburn Church just after 9.30am. After a much needed 5 minutes dripping inside his van and stuffing my face with almost everything on offer it was back out into the wilds with the rain and wind showing no sign of abating.

Up through the Wythburn Valley I, at least, felt confident of my navigation now being on the Old County Tops route which John Duff and I had strode a mere five weeks earlier. Looking up only briefly to "admire" the raging torrents I knew that a long unyielding uphill slog lay ahead it was time to just knuckle down whilst keeping spirits up whilst enjoying my own company every bit as much as I had for the past 6 hours. Mercifully at some point the rain did relent, I never went more than knee deep in the bog which is appropriately called The Bog and the visibility remained

good. As a result I hit Greenup Edge right on the mark having endured another lung busting ascent of Flour Gill.

However, some scudding low cloud meant I was grateful for those great navigational aids (i.e. fence posts plus the footprints of Andy and Fi who had started out at 4am) to get me over Low White Stones and the next punch point on High Raise summit just about bang on 11am. Lying prone inside the stone shelter I managed, after a fashion, to change into my full on winter gloves having had to use my teeth to do so whilst devouring half a dozen jelly snakes of the variety which had powered Steph to her Bob Graham triumph.

Remarkably I found the narrow path down to Stake Pass without too much navigational pain, having been convinced I would end up either at Sergeant Man or Thunacar Knott. With the next checkpoint safely located a rapid descent ensued, well by my standards, down into Langstrath, under a very pale and watery sun.

The “path reconstituters” have been active in this area giving rise to hideous (in my view) raised zigzag paths. I am sure environmentally they are bang on but of no use to the impatient fellrunner who had to trend off to the left and run “off piste” in order to get from A to B in quickest fashion.

Shortly after 12.15pm I punched my card on the storm gate under the bridge where the Langstrath Beck meets Greenup Gill. Next up (literally) was a hideously steep yet scenic ascent up through a wood which brings you out onto the open fell near to Dock Tarn. From here it is just a case of following the path in-between a profusion of little hillocks down to Watendlath. The post run chit chat suggested that a quicker route, as taken by Andy and Fi, was to run down to Rosthwaite and take the path up from there. It materialised that this choice had not been down to copious research but due to the fact that Andy had wanted to avail himself of the facilities in the village and I don't mean the tearooms.

From Watendlath, where I could not find the checkpoint punch, despite searching about a dozen trees, it was up onto the desolate boggy and featureless morass which heads in the general direction of Wythburn. However, with Blea Tarn located the path down to Thirlmere, via Harrop Tarn was easily found. The paths were hideously slippy and the forest tracks were a mess due to the level of harvesting going on at present. So bad was it that for once I was grateful to reach a bit of tarmac, being the road that runs around the west side of the lake. And so this 17 mile circuit brought me back to the car park at Wythburn which I had left nearly 5 hours earlier. To pass the time Joe had had to sort out a flat battery but was cheerily on hand with a much needed cup of tea at the ready.

Shortly after 3.20pm, over 10 hours in, I reluctantly prised myself out of the van and into the forest for the slog up Helvellyn. Any thoughts of taking the clever and shorter traverse route were quickly dispensed with on grounds it was too much like hard work and at this stage in the day I was happy to stick to the walkers' path.

As the rain returned once again and the wind gained strength, albeit at my back, I passed the time by counting a thousand pairs of steps and then another thousand. By the time I had completed this intellectually challenging exercise the ground was leveling off and I had managed to start running, if for no other reason to keep warm.

The summit of Helvellyn was a wild and miserable place to be that afternoon and unsurprisingly was also totally deserted. The punch had long slipped its moorings on the trig point and by now was probably nestling at the bottom of Red Tarn. I had planned to descend by Striding Edge but as Joe had suggested Swirral Edge would afford more running time, albeit longer in distance, this was the option I took.

It has been about 5 years since Swirral Edge and I have had the pleasure of each others company and time has not been particularly kind to either of us. The initial descent is more eroded and rougher in features (a bit like myself) but once through this section it did afford the opportunity to run along the edge. The other benefit was that as you cross towards the Hole in the Wall by the Red Tarn outlet you are afforded a magnificent panorama of Helvellyn closed in by Striding & Swirral Edges. The dark clouds swirling and spiralling around the tops just adding to its majesty, beauty and menace.

The ladder stile at the Hole in the Wall was reached just ahead of 5pm, marking my 12<sup>th</sup> hour on the hoof, with a steady descent back into Grisedale beckoning. As I neared the valley bottom the familiar sound of the Patterdale Foxhounds were there to greet my return as was Simon in Patterdale to feed me on a heady concoction of malt loaf, jelly babies and custard creams. Ten miles to go.

The ascent to Boardale Hause was soon attained and my joy became unconfounded as for the first time that day the sun cast a shadow and a rainbow lit up Boardale.....and then it started raining again.

After an initial steep rocky descent the path into Boardale becomes grassy and whilst now a stream of no mean proportions it provided almost cushion like running conditions. Having reached the road which took me back to Martindale the return leg to Askham was undertaken without mishap and in calmer conditions. The Cockpit was found with only a minor deviation and the moor was alive with the chatter of a multitude of birds welcoming me back to civilisation.

As I ran into Askham Village I was overcome with the paradoxical feelings of relief that my efforts were nearly at an end whilst at the same time not wanting it to finish (advanced delirium had probably set it and no wonder having gone over 17 days without so much of as a sniff of a pint of fine ale). A final little sprint returned me to the Village Hall bang on 8.20pm, some 15 hours and 20 minutes after I had left. The ensuing cups of tea, burger and custard creams never tasted so good as we sat around the table recalling our exertions of the day.

Sincere thanks to Joe and his team for the excellent organization, the sustenance before, during and after the event and for the words of encouragement at the various checkpoints, it was all hugely appreciated.

Gluttons for punishment one and all.

John Telfer  
June 26, 2012