

LAKELAND 40 - DAWN 2 DUSK – Saturday April 6, 2013

42 miles (if you take the correct course) and c11,500 feet of ascent

When Joe Faulkner sets to work on devising a long, hard day out in Lakeland it is best to come prepared. The second running of this event was over a new course, a new distance and on a new date, April rather than June.....and what a day it was. Twenty five runners, twenty four finishers, the women sharing the spoils with the men as local runner Kim Collison claimed victory in just under 8 hours whilst Carnethy duo Jasmin Paris and Konrad Rawlik took second and third followed in by Nicky Spinks. Meanwhile further down the field.....

04:15 am – Southwaite Service Station (M6)

Who says the romance and magic has gone out of fellrunning? There I was sat in my car in an almost deserted car park at Southwaite Services just off the M6 tucking into my porridge and chocolate brownie with the car thermometer showing an outside temperature of around minus 4. Having left Haddington just after 2am having had only 4 rather fitful hours of sleep this was not the only point in the day when I pondered my sanity never mind my physical well being.

05:20 am – Askham Village Hall

As bodies stirred in their sleeping bags like butterflies emerging from their chrysalis state the method of my madness began to unfold. A final briefing in the relative warmth of the hall just before 6am and we were then led out into a village still asleep just as the first signs of dawn appeared.



The briefing just before dawn. Spot the worried looking NFR runner.
Photo: Claire Maxted – Trail Running Magazine

The Race

True to form I set off like the proverbial clappers and was still doing so in 5th place as we left the village and ran out onto a frozen but mercifully snow free Askham Moor with its paths going off in all directions to the accompaniment of the dawn chorus as the sun began to show its full light.

Whether it was these euphoric surroundings or just plain stupidity as the first runners sprang off to the right and left it was all too much for me to comprehend and so I went down the middle path which very soon turned into the middle of a bit of tufty grass and then bog before I could take in the enormity of my stupidity. In so doing I had shipped about a dozen places by the time I made it back onto the path heading for Loadpot Hill.

Chastising myself for such an elemental error I sought comfort in the knowledge that a majority of these folk would have overtaken me anyway once the first serious climb had come upon us. However, what was now very much upon us was the snowline and ahead of us lay a magical almost Alpine snowscape as we crested the first checkpoint, the trig point on Loadpot Hill. 6 miles down but still a lot more to come.

Whether stirred by this amazing sight of white or the fact that Stewart Barrie had come within my sightline I ploughed on and began to make up some of those lost places on the next descent and then upon onto Wether Hill. The long 2 mile plus stretch out to High Raise was over hard snow which with the early morning sun beaming down gave cause to resort to wearing sunshades at 8am !! In fact I think the snow made for better running as the last time I was in these parts, albeit over 10 years ago, I remember a squelchy grassy path not conducive to easy running.



Early morning – the route from Rampsgill Head with the climb to High Street ahead

Photo : Ant Cooper

As is often the case in these events the guys in front have long gone and I find myself running in perfect solitude making my way around Rampsgill Head, The Nab off to the west and Kidsty Pike off to the east and glimpses down to Haweswater. Rounding Twopenny Crag with the path barely three feet from a precipitous snow filled gully I was joined by Teviotdale's Kenny Short, having left Stewart to his own devices, gliding effortlessly over the snow in his yaktrax (guess what I bought on t'internet less than 24 hours later?). We kept each other company on the mile or so up the Straits of Riggindale or should that be, Kenny slowed his pace whilst I went full pelt, and clipped at the trig point on High Street before pounding through the snow somewhat more yielding on the descent as we ran faster exerting more pressure beneath us.

Running back up to The Knott, the "recommended" route of descent to the Hartsop checkpoint Kenny stopped to take a few photos and I bashed on ahead sure to see him again very soon. Blanket deep snow gave way to those large tracts of snow whilst all around was bare fellside. It was on one such descent as I pelted down snow hoping to reach the next patch of grass in one piece that I came upon fellow runner Sally Ozanne fixing on her own version of yaktrax. Curiously enough, although we probably only ran in each other's company for a maximum of half an hour over the next 7 and a half hours she was seldom out of my sight, but then again I can see better at long distances than shorter ones these days.

Stewart then appeared on the slope somewhat "off piste" having decided his dodgy Achilles was not up to the task in hand and had foregone the joys of High Street to retire at the next checkpoint. Despite doing so he still made his way back to the finish, some 12+ miles, under his own steam and even set up the clip point on top of Place Fell.

Despite leaving the Hartsop checkpoint at the same time as Kenny, once through the quaint little hamlets of Crookabeck and Rooking, he just shifted through the gears and left me trailing whereas the only gear change I could muster was to take off my gloves and hat as Spring had well and truly sprung in the valleys at least and that rare phenomena of warmth was felt.

The long slog up Grisedale is actually quite runnable even by my standards up until the climbing hut at Ruthwaite Cove when the gradient up to the tarn becomes more severe. Having long forgotten about Kenny I had somehow got it into my mind there was nobody within striking distance behind me...and neither there was until Sally appeared as if out of nowhere and having exchanged a few words gained 50 yards on me without seeming to put in much additional effort, which led me to believe I was just not travelling very fast.

The bowl around Griesdale Tarn was bathed in sun, clad in deep snow with the tarn deeply frozen over. Not much fancying the sharp cut path down to Dunmail along Raise Beck which I knew would be a mass of ice and curious to see Sally and some other runner who we had caught up traversing across Willie Wife's Moor under Dollywaggon Pike (who makes up these names?) I thought if it was to end in tears I wouldn't be alone.

Good progress was made over a mixture of grass and then vast tracts of snow seemingly impervious to the glare and "warmth" of the sun. That was until the descent became abhorrently steep and descending over frozen snow in nothing more than running studs did not seem like a life extending experience. The sight of the other runner using his walking pole as an impromptu ice axe and not getting very far and whilst Sally in her Yaktrax equivalent made short work of matters I was forced to beat a retreat to find some more hospitable ground.

For once the fellrunning gods smiled upon me and by heading back and down a bit I found a grassy sheep trod to run along which then ran into another hideously steep patch of snow patch being about the size of a football pitch. However, our four legged friends had been more resolute than me by these conditions and had stayed faithful to their trod and in the process had broken up the snow to afford sufficient grip to permit a slightly timorous two legged creature across deploying a sedate, cautious yet highly safe traverse.

From there is way grass all the way down to Wythburn where I caught up with Sally who declared herself happier on the steep uphill rather than the downhill. We arrived at the checkpoint together, although Sally was soon off. It was just before 11.30am, nearly 5 and a half hours into this latest odyssey having covered around 22 miles and 5,500 feet of ascent. I was in 11th place, which is where I had been at Hartsop nearly two hours earlier and where I would be at the finish in another 5 and a half hours.

Climbing up through Wythburn forest I was passed by Claire Maxted coming in the opposite direction being on her final descent into Wythburn and so appeared to have approached the route from a somewhat different angle to the one Sally and I had deployed. I had this feeling we had met somewhere before but couldn't put my finger on it. It was only after the race and a bit of internet rummaging that it dawned on me that Claire and I had met fleetingly last year on Great End when she was out researching an article on the BG Round for Trail Running magazine, of which she is editor, on a day I was out with Steph reccieing Leg 3 for her own BG Round. Whatever, Steph and I said to her that day must obviously have had some effect as she is undertaking her own BG attempt in the middle of May...now there's an idea.

As I headed up through the woods full in the knowledge that the longest and hardest climb to Helvellyn lay ahead I nevertheless felt strong, buoyed by the fact that I was over half way through, what could possibly go wrong?

The first ominous signs of what was to come began to make themselves known as large accumulations of snow lay deep inside the forest despite the canopy of tree cover and then horror of all horrors on reaching the gate on to the open fell, something worse than a pub with no beer, no path !!! No doubt the sun shielding nature of the surrounding trees and the viciousness of the slope probably abetted by the work of the wind meant that the normal contouring path that sets you off up to Helvellyn was nowhere to be seen under mountains of the white stuff.

All I could see to guide me, and it may just have been my eyesight could have been failing me at this point, was some barely visible vertical footprints going up through this latest snowfield. Logic dictated that 10 or so runners and no doubt a number of walkers must have been this way but of their tracks I saw none. So faced with little immediate alternative I started gingerly up this slope often supporting myself with four points of contact. But it worked and as I got above the tree line once again snow gave way to greenery and then back to snow but miracle of miracles the path appeared and all was well.

I bashed on back up into the amazing winter wonderland, with Joe's friend John Bamber there with camera ready to capture the moment for posterity. After the counting of many steps the ridge of the snow covered Helvellyn range was attained, sporting huge cornices that made you think very hard before remembering this was the first week of April and not the last one in December.

After such a herculean effort the final ascent up to the Helvellyn trig point clip was almost achieved with ease under what I kept telling (deluding) myself were the admiring gazes of those enjoying their lunch in quite glorious conditions, although I did think one young chap walking in a T shirt and three quarter length trousers was pushing his luck a bit.

An exhilarating descent down Lower Man, with walkers good-naturedly scattering as myself and Jonathan Tombs, an Eden Valley runner who I had been playing cat and mouse with since half way up Helvellyn bore down upon them, and up and over Whiteside before curving off down the contoured path above Keppel Cove. Despite stunning views of snow caked Swirral Edge and Catseye Cam the going underfoot was becoming noticeably softer until after over 7 hours on the hoof I put my feet in some mud for the first time that day.



Looking back to Helvellyn Lower Man from the slopes of Whiteside
Photo : Claire Maxted – Trail Running Magazine

I chose the approach road to Glenridding to make my second, but less critical, navigational faux pas of the day, by veering off the main path believing there to be a sneaky short cut over by Lanty's Tarn. However, the steepness of the gradient that this presented quickly persuaded me to head back down past the campsite and into Glenridding and along the road to the checkpoint at Patterdale just around a quarter to 2 where once again I met up with Sally and Jonathan.

Maybe fatigue was unknowingly creeping up on me but I was quite happy to stop a bit longer than was my wont and chat with the marshals, Sally and Jonathan but whilst the latter fished another sandwich out of his pack, Sally and I headed off towards Boredale Hause. On the run out she rather amusingly told me that she wasn't really a runner to which all manner of sarcastic comments flashed through my head but I managed to restrain myself and just ask "So what are you?" The simple answer was a mountain biker and a very accomplished one at that.

As such the reasoning behind her climbing prowess all clicked into place, (or should that be into gear ?) and as if to illustrate the point skipped off up towards the Hause whilst my pace became ever more laboured. The ascent of Place Fell, the last significant climb of the day and only c9 miles from the finish marked a definitive low point in my day. The path was steep and never ending and no matter how many steps I counted I didn't seem to be getting any nearer the summit.

Logic dictated there was no other option but to trudge on I eventually reached the summit ridge but no matter how I tried I could just not force myself into a running motion. I

consoled myself that it will pass, but even on hitting the summit and starting my descent



Mr Grumpy wheezing up Place Fell
Photo : Hilary Rounsley

all I could manage was a disjointed shuffle. Then, as with so many of these long days out a flick is switched, energy seeped through my joints and I was back off and running. Not only that, but I found a shortcut down to the valley floor that involved running on springy turf, such that by the time I was filling up with water from a beck in Martindale I had managed to overtake Sally who had arrived right on cue having taken a more scenic route.

We walked to the final clip-point at Martindale church and then ran under the flanks of Steel Knots together but as soon as the ascent started back over to Askham Moor and the finish beckoned, normal service was resumed and once again I was left trailing in her wake.

The final surprise of the day was the appearance out of nowhere of Jonathan who I had visualized still being somewhere on Place Fell, but maybe fortified by that extra sandwich in Patterdale, and aided by a clever short cut at Martindale Hause he was back ahead of me. A few words and then despite declaring himself totally trashed he sauntered off and ran the last few miles to the finish with Sally. Clearly his version of “trashed” did not have the same intensity as my definition did.

Despite obvious fatigue, the hope and knowledge that the finish is not that far away does somehow result in extra energy being dragged from the very recesses of the body. Despite the odd furtive glance behind to ensure that no further runners were putting in last spurt I was happily making to progress to the finish and managed to negotiate my way past some rather vicious looking wild fell ponies and hit the tarmac less than a mile from the finish.

Whilst this should have been the time to start reflecting on my day out a glance at my watch indicated that I had just under 10 minutes to finish within the 11 hour mark, triggering one

final frantic dash into Askham to crash through the doors of the community hall, 2 minutes under 11 hours, 11th out of the 24 finishers, in fact the same position I had been at Hartsop some 8 hours and 30 miles earlier.

What is there left to say? A great day out with that heady mix of winter conditions but on a glorious spring day, organization and support (in every sense of the word) being spot on in every respect....and only just over 8 months to Joe's winter specialty, the Winter Tour de Helvellyn, funny I could have sworn that is what I had just done.

Full results here : <http://www.nav4.co.uk/events/lakes-mountain-40-dawn-to-dusk/results/>

John Telfer
April 11, 2013