

Lake District Mountain Trial - 2015

It was a busy weekend for NFR with representation in a great range of races with purple and green on show at the very least in the World Mountain Running Championships, the inaugural Lakes Sky Ultra, the local Ingram Show fell race and the Lake District Mountain Trial (and no doubt some at the GNR?)

It was my first showing at the LDMT, but it has always suited my strengths and interests of longer mountain days involving navigation and route choice.

Rosie and I drove over in the van on the Saturday evening, picking up Adam Stirk in Penrith (my usual partner in crime for MMs) before parking up at the YH in Borrowdale - this year's HQ for the event. The LDMT is an orienteering style fell race with three courses, the classic, medium and short but all three courses provide similar challenges in navigation and route choice over varied mountain terrain.

Walking the dog that evening along the rocky riverside path I was concerned that this would be the run in – it turns out it was – I was not looking forward to fast running on such greasy rocky terrain with tired legs!

It was a luxury to be sleeping in the van, however I still woke to the sound of the heavy rain on the roof, but fortunately it cleared by the morning and stayed dry all day. The cloud remained down to 600m until midday then cleared to be a fine afternoon.

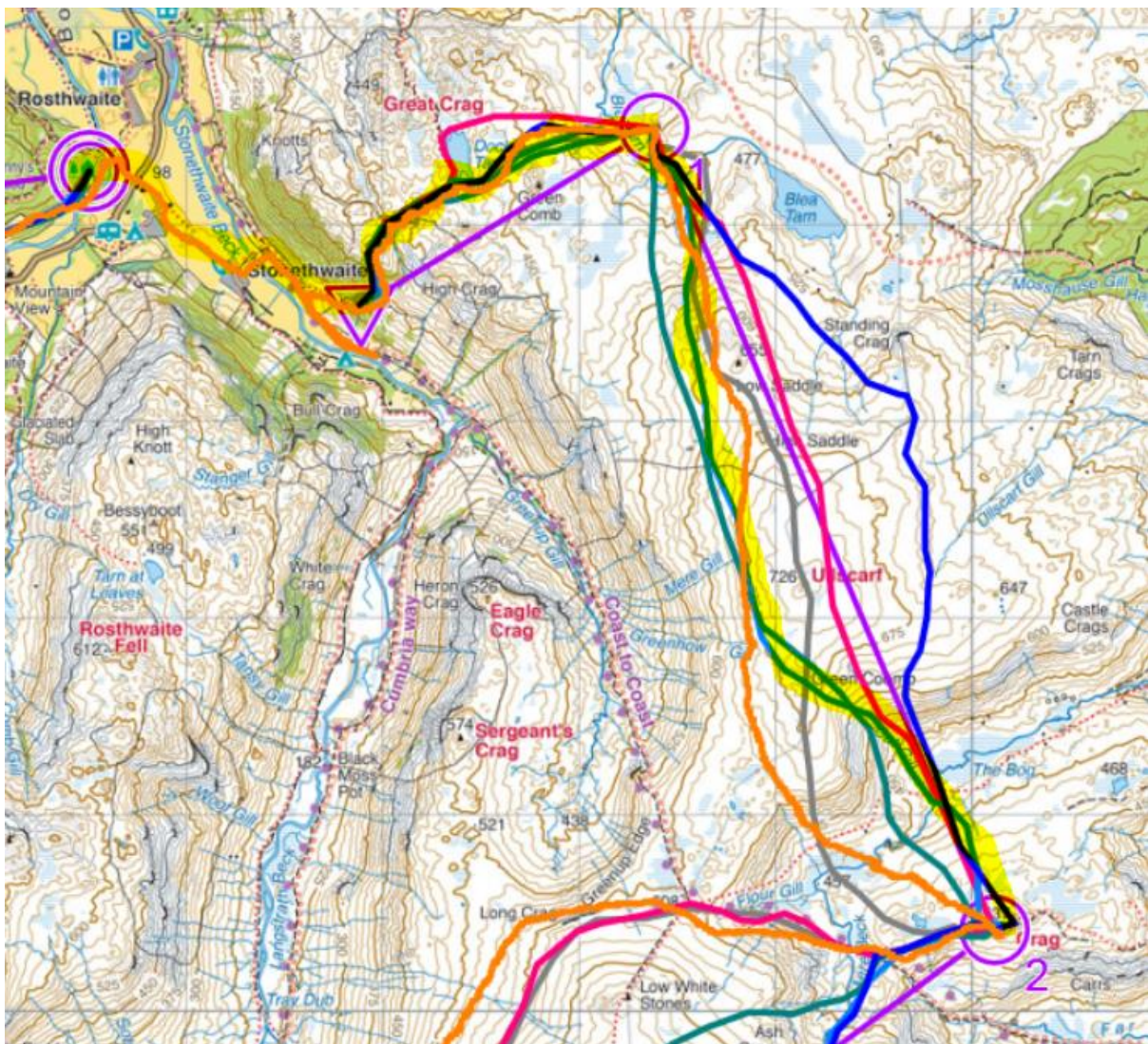
With staggered starts I was off at 09:00, the first starters out at 08:30, delayed only for a quick picture with the NFR boys Mark, Matt and Frank who had later start times.



The first 2km of the race was taped (scarcely) and I only just noticed the tape leading up the hill into the woods above Stonethwaite to where the maps were issued – this caught a few people out early in the race and it wasn't particularly obvious.

With map in hand I set about my plan for the day – go out and have fun. Hoping for a top 10 finish and a consistent run I wasn't taking a watch, running hard but within my limits and eating little and often. I was reassured that having passed around 5 people on the run out I had now caught Matt Reedy on the climb to the Crag of control 1. Matt smashed it on Day 2 of the SLMM to take the win so I knew he would be tough competition. We promptly took completely different routes to control 2, I headed west of Ullscarf and he east - straight into the thick cloud. With the compass out I struggled to run the boggy tussocky contour with heavy legs and took a terrible line to drop into 'the bog' via steep densely bracken slopes and stopped briefly to take a drink at the river to help wash down a cereal bar.

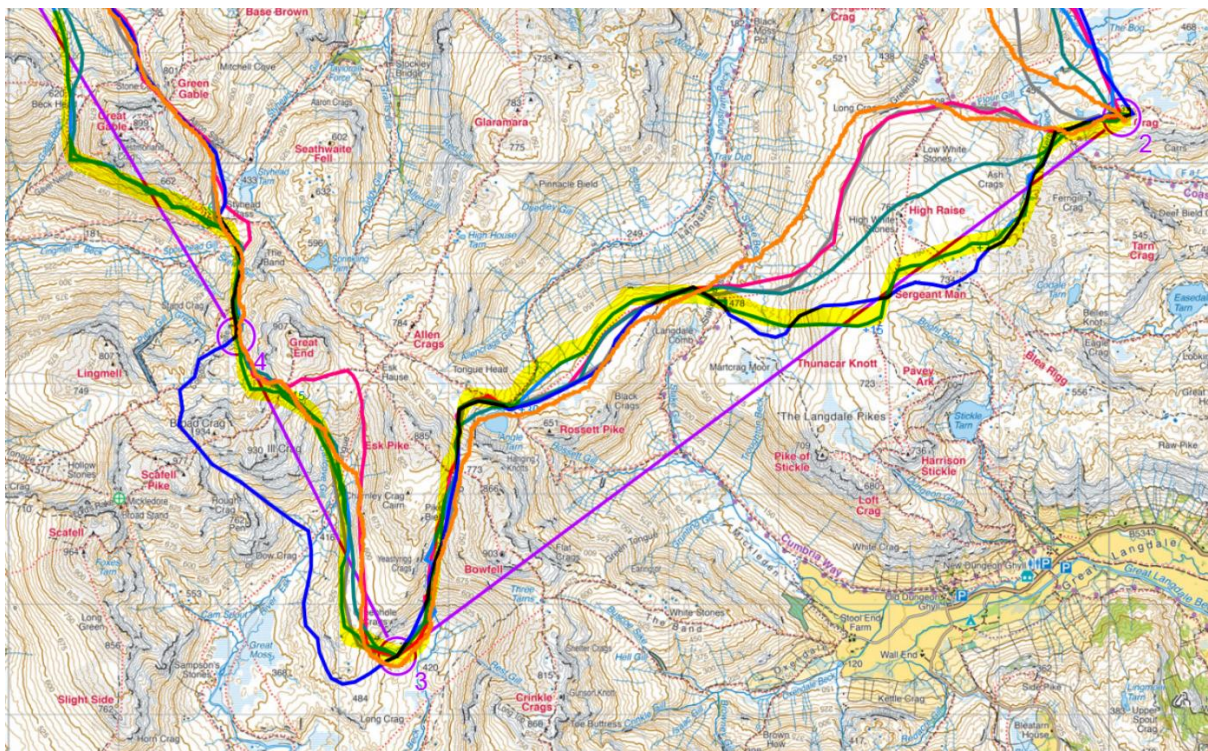
I was pleased that the cloud was down at this point, my nav is usually reliable and I hoped it might slow some of the faster runners down on the technical approach to Calf Crag. I arrived at control 2 at exactly the same time as Matt but from opposite directions



From control 2 there was a long leg to find a boulder tucked away behind bowfel. Now racing Matt I took my eye off the map in the clag as he reassured me he was taking the Old County tops line via 'greenup edge' too, so I tucked in and followed.

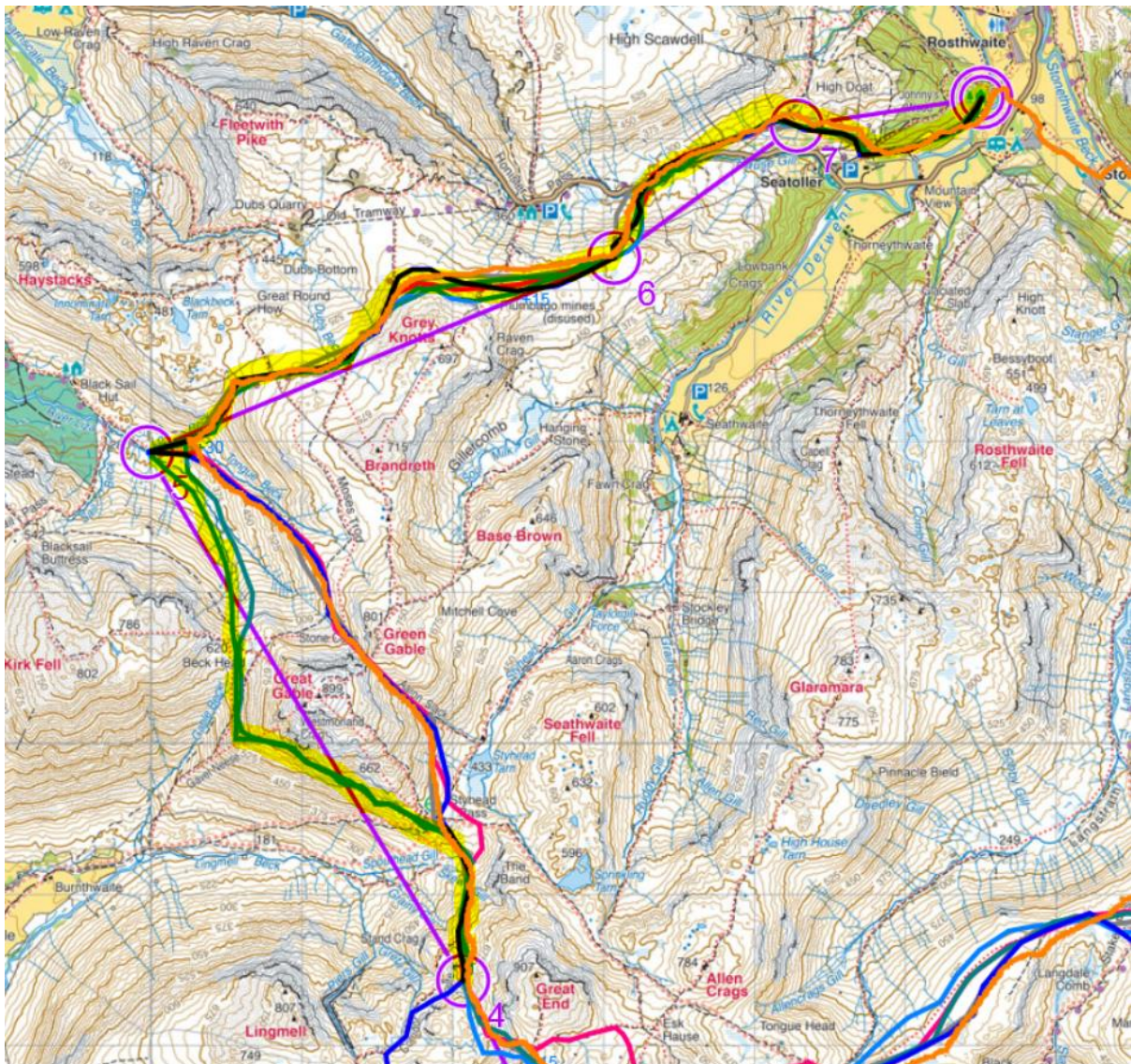
I pushed out a strong climb to drop Matt and fortunately my familiarity with the BG route paid dividends as, despite the mist, I recognised that I had in fact picked up my preferred BG line along the stream to Seargent Man by mistake. Despite knowing I was no longer on the most optimum line I knew where I was on the map and continued up the climb.

After a little disorientation at the top following the path between High Raise and Thunacar I then flew off the side of Thunacar Knott on a confident loose bearing and the clag lifted to confirm my position and I enjoyed striding out on the runnable grass to Snakes Pass trying to make up some time – searching for Matt ahead who I was convinced must have pulled some time on me. From here onwards I was unaware I was 'leading' the classic course but had the constant feeling I was being hunted down – I sure was! The remaining route to Control 3 was an obvious line and good running to Angle Tarn and then via Ore Gap to drop via Yeastyrigg Gill to the Boulder.



There was once again some good route choice up and out of Control 3 to a tarn just above the corridor route the other side of the Scafell range. I knew my legs were starting to struggle with climbs and I am stronger on rough contours so opted to suit my strengths and took a very efficient contouring line up at 575m and then up Callcove Gill to scramble up over the saddle below Great End. In the clag again I checked the map to ensure I was dropping height correctly and avoiding the crags, after losing 50m of height I was out of the cloud and could see the tarn and marshals below and trotted down the lose wet ground, rescuing slips

numerous times and not for the first (or last) time that day regretting not replacing my mudclaws.



The marshal at the tarn told me I was first through 4, I was surprised but decided that meant if I ran hard from here I might avoid being caught by the faster runners setting off after me and I might have the privilege of being first classic home. Using this as my motivation I trotted down the rocks of the corridor route, longing for grass as I tried to concentrate on my feet and the map and make my mind up on which way to approach control 5. Compliments to the planner again – a tricky choice where knowledge of the terrain would have helped. I opted for the climbers traverse around Great Gable rather than the 100m extra climb between Green and Great Gable. Looking at the splits I chose the harder route and the very rough rocky ground and scrambling started to induce cramp, which prevented my enjoying the grassy descent to the riverside control 5, limping along before a big drink and a change of cadence on the path out of the control provided temporary relief.

Knowing this was the last climb I dug in and worked hard, with little navigation required from there on it was a case of maintaining a stride and cadence that avoided unnecessary

sudden movement. Despite the restraint I still tripped and fell numerous times in cramp induced shouts and took on a mouthful of water at every stream to give me some hope of being able to stride out on the run in.

The dog walk the night before had at least prepared me for the rough finish and, after a glance over my shoulder following picking myself up after another fall I established I could afford to ease up with no 'classics' in sight and decided that I would be better to finish in one piece than sprint the rocks.

It was a glorious feeling to see Rosie and Riley at the finish as the announcer called my name and confirmed I was the first classic home in 5hrs 23minutes.

The atmosphere at the finish was fun and relaxed as people from all courses filtered off the hills. Unsurprisingly, as some of the faster later starters came in my position gradually dropped but I was pleased to have met my goals of a consistent run, a top 10 finish and most of all I had a lot of fun!

The other advantage of being first home was I got to cheer all the other competitors and friends in and enjoy the afternoon sun, an icy soak in the river and a massage! Everyone I spoke to had enjoyed the challenge and route choice, although the tough terrain (it was tough – even for the experienced MMers) seemed to have frustrated some people more than others and the later starters seem to have benefited from improved conditions.

Rhys Findlay Robinson won in 4hrs40, a feat made all the more impressive given his 6th place at the 8 day Transalpine Run just one week ago – that is not an easy race to recover from (trust me!!). Unsurprisingly Borrowdale were represented on the podium with Steve B and Scoffer both some 20-25mins behind Rhys.

I was chuffed to see such strong performances from my friends and NFR teammates with Matt looking fresh as a daisy having stormed to 4th place in the medium course in 4hrs18 and Frank and Mark putting in strong performances to finish in 6hrs04 and 6hrs18 respectively on the classic course – Frank chose all the perfect lines as usual!!

Unfortunately at the prize giving NFR mistakenly had our moment of glory for finishing second place team overlooked – but nevertheless we were indeed second place!

A great day out – thanks to all the organisers and volunteers for putting on a fantastic event!

Andrew Higgins