

Marmot Dark Mountain 2019 – 26/27th January – Lowther Castle

I haven't written a race/event report for a little while and there seems a shortage of these on the NFR website of late, so I thought I'd write a short piece about this challenging event to try and make some sense of it all.

We're passing Angle Tarn, it's after midnight, it's freezing cold, windy as hell, we're soaked, and the rain of the past 4 hours has now turned to snow... Jonny turns to me and says "I'm not sure I'm enjoying this...", I mumble something and we continue on. What a crazy concept this event is, take the two days of a mountain marathon event, and combine the distance and time into one long night at the end of January... the Marmot Dark Mountains.



Event photo @Anthony Harvey

I have followed the exploits of Andy Higgins and Adam Stirk on this event the past couple of years, checking on progress before going to bed for the night. Awaking to find they were still running! I suppose I was inspired to give it a go and following a short exchange of messages with former NFR (now Ambleside) runner Jonny Malley, we entered. A run around the fantastic McWilliam's round (short), and a night navigation practice at Alwinton (facilitated by coach Higgins) was our preparation for the Long score class; 12 hours to navigate through a route of our choice to score as many points as possible and return to the finish. Simple. (Map available [here](#)).

We had both been anxious about this event in the week leading up to it. Both suffering from some illness and worried about the physical demands of running through the night. We both managed a power nap mid-afternoon and headed over to the event at Lowther Castle for 7pm. Following registration and after some faffing about deliberating on which layers to wear and which layers to carry, we set off at 20:32 (staggered starts times for all teams). Luckily for me, the young terrier Malley had been out on his local park run in the morning so he seemed to have burnt off his youthful 'excess energy'. This worked really well (for me) and the early pace was great. We made good progress through controls, having opted for a general anti-clockwise route of the area, attempting to limit the impact of the 50-60mph North-Westerly winds and -22degC wind-chill! We planned to try and get to most controls and push ourselves to do well. The second control didn't go too smoothly and we lost 5-6 minutes, not a great start, but it got us both switched on to the task at hand and we made good progress from there.

And so we found ourselves, having passed Angle Tarn, heading for Rest Dodd, wondering what we doing, and how exactly we'd got into doing this (sorry Jonny!). As snow drifts built up to knee height and the clock ticked away, the weather eventually cleared and the moon and stars came out. Keeping moving was key, and the two times we stopped for a few minutes to sort kit and food, we got cold very quickly. Jonny's navigation was excellent, and bizarrely the remaining hours seemed to go fairly quickly. Before we knew it, we were having to miss a couple of controls to start the 'dash' for the finish. One control was very frustrating as we hit the wrong steam junction and headed down stream. Once we relocated, we decided we didn't have time to go back. This certainly kicked me back into gear and the pace was upped in frustration. Dawn breaking was a real highlight and it was really nice to finish the last hour in morning daylight. The final road section through Askham and up to the

event centre at Lowther Castle really hurt, but we came in after 11 hours and 43 mins. We had covered 36 miles with 2200m of ascent. We were both knackered, and on arrival gutted to see we were second place by 10 points. Coach Higgins would not be happy! However we suspected Jonny's dibber had not registered the last 5-6 controls (mine had and we had the event tracker), so with our true score calculated we were really chuffed to see we had indeed won the Long Score class, scoring 750 points from a possible 900 (coach Higgins might speak to us now).

Finally, the million dollar questions... did I enjoy it and would I do it again. Bizarrely it all seems a bit of a blur. The conditions were horrific at times and running right through the night was a first for me. However, I seemed to come through strongly, and felt good in the final hour. I think I did enjoy it... it was certainly physically and mentally challenging, and a very memorable experience, which I've found difficult to put into words. Would I run it again... yes! (I just need to convince Jonny he wants to run it again too).

Thank you to the organisers, event staff, and volunteers for putting on this event.

Full results and tracker replay: [http://www.marmot-dark-mountains.com/news/2019/01/26/2019 Courses revealed /](http://www.marmot-dark-mountains.com/news/2019/01/26/2019_Courses_revealed/)

Mark Clarkson