

Darren Holloway Memorial Race Buttermere

Saturday 24th June 2023

Rob Salter



Three of us from NFR were on the entry list and headed over to race in the west lakes at the weekend at the Darren Holloway memorial Buttermere horseshoe (short), Gary Mason, Dexter and myself. NFR legend Dexter showing usual grit running with his left hand in a cast from a recent fall and Gary who continues to churn out the long races having already run both Ennerdale AND Great Lakes (and always smiles whatever the weather and however hard the race is!). Prior to Great Lakes the week before I hadn't actually raced since Coledale having missed Newlands due to a bug and then various lakes medium races being cancelled or moved in the diary. I'd planned to use Great Lakes as a training run and then give Buttermere more of a go. Coming off Bow Fell with the legs not feeling top notch I'd realised it was not going to be just a training run, more a proper slog but it was still a good one to get in the legs and with all that climb.

The Darren Holloway 'short' race while clearly not the bruiser of its full horseshoe sibling (22m/8500ft of ascent) is still one that has to be respected at

12.9 miles and 5000ft of climb. The route includes a tough climb up Whiteside, some ridge running to Hopegill Head and then after and out and back to Grasmoor before the long descent to Buttermere village which people will know who've done the Sailbeck race. There then follows a long run round from Buttermere village to the final climb up Melbreak before a run back to the village hall.

The first section along the road, through the woods and over to the start of Whiteside is quite fast so I decided to take it easy for fear of paying dearly on the first climb. That was wise because it's a real killer (most first climbs are to be fair) though because of the clag you couldn't see the top which mentally made it a bit easier. Proper fell conditions on the first summits round to Grasmoor with the clag fully in and strong wind in parts. I was flagging a bit on the early climb up Grasmoor but managed to pick up a bit and latch onto a group ahead which always makes running and nav easier and for the descent off Grasmoor.

After the initial descent to the Whittless Pike checkpoint you then have an eyeballs out descent down to valley and Buttermere village which is exceptional running but also pretty technical in the first sections. It's a great feeling to suddenly emerge from the clag and look down into the valley and the lakes. What feels hard about this race is you belt down to the valley and then on battered legs have to switch into flat running mode to head through Buttermere village (and bewildered looking tourists) all the way round the eastern side of Crummock water to the base of Melbreak. I was starting to flag and then took a wrong left turn at a fork which meant I had to double back right to pick up the racing line up Melbreak meaning going off piste through vegetation, brambles, climbing a fence and hidden small gulleys (proper fell racing I guess!)

The climb up Melbreak or 'MelBROKEN' is brutally steep and direct and there's not much more you can do than just get on with it. It finally eases and there's a short running section along the top before a sharp left and steep descent down to the bridleway in Mosedale. Then there's the final run down towards the Kirkstile Inn and the beer garden before a final climb on the road to the village hall and the finish. It really is a fantastic race but definitely shouldn't be taken lightly. It feels a bit like doing Coledale with more running at the start and then a hard basically flattish running section before the final really hard climb at the end to finish you off!

A truly amazing food spread put on at the finish in the village hall, and plenty laughter and the toughness of the route, nav errors etc. Well done to Gary and Dexter and we all felt like we'd run a hard race at the finish. The food spread at the village hall was something else and the scenic backdrop from the village hall on the hill looking out at Crummock water and the surround fells of the route you've just run takes some beating. The long race looks a monster, hmm next year maybe.

Rob Salter - 2.49 (19th)
Dexter - 3.52 (41st)
Gary Mason - 3.53 (43rd)







Photos by Kim Taylor and great support from Wendy.

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