



BCR Newsie

AUGUST 2022



In this Edition...

Wow! It's clearly been a busy six months for everyone at BCR because we've got a **bumper** edition of the Newsie this time around. Thanks to everyone who contributed by sending in articles — it's been a pleasure to read all your reflections and find out about what you've all been up to. Here's what you can expect in the next 49(!) pages...

BCR at the Races

BCRs have been busy flying the green and black flag all over the Lake District and beyond this year: Viv, Emma, Ava and I share our experiences of completing some of this year's club champs races for the first time on **page 12**, while Josh provides us with a blow-by-blow account of his and Harry's storming second-place finish at Old County Tops on **page 26**. Beth provides us with her thoughts on some very impressive victories this year: there's a write-up of her Saunders Lakeland Mountain Marathon win with Eleanor on **page 28**, and she offers some invaluable racing tips inspired by her Winter League win on **page 20**. There's also a recap of the Winter League as a whole on **page 18**. On **page 31**, Harry describes his experience of the Yorkshire Three Peaks race — someone let me know if you figure out all the metal references! A couple of BCRs have also taken this opportunity to reflect on their experience of running and racing as a whole: Helen explains the importance of running to her and talks us through some of her recent racing success (**page 32**), while Rachel gives us a wonderfully tongue-in-cheek account of the races she's completed in the last year (**page 34**).

Awesome Achievements

It's not just on the racing front that BCRs have been busy — on **page 2**, Sarah talks us through every step of her inspirational Bob Graham success; then on **page 22**, Kevin introduces some swimming to the mix, describing his recent Frog Graham completion and the story behind it. On **page 42**, Eleanor reflects on a wonderful day spent running the Cumbrian Traverse, and on **page 46**, Gavin paints a vivid picture of his experiences supporting John Kelly on his epic Wainwrights Round.

And that's not all...

If all of that's not enough for you, there are even more articles to sink your teeth into: on **page 38**, there's an interview with club deputy-chair and longtime member Nick, while there's an interview of a different sort on **page 30**, as Beth quizzes four-year-old Charlotte to get her opinions on all things fell running. On **page 17**, Dave gives us some background to the Tuesday-morning 'Old Codgers and Recoverers' run, and finally, I've found room for a quick quiz on **page 41**.

I hope you enjoy reading and look forward to seeing you all out on the fells soon!

Robbie

Captain's Corner

Hello Black Combe Runners,

Welcome to this super edition of The Newsie, which nearly rivals The Fellrunner for content! My thanks for all your submissions and updates; I have been blown away by everyone's adventures and escapades. Hopefully, there is a little something for everyone and the accounts provide a source of inspiration to start putting plans in place to achieve that next challenge or goal, however big or small.

On a personal note, when not battling Ethan, Robbie or Tim, I have enjoyed trying some different races for the first time year. The Manx Mountain Marathon was a brilliant route from Ramsey to Port Erin across the spine of the Isle of Man. It is certainly an event worth experiencing, but just be wary of Manannan's Cloak and the rather long ferry journey!

In a similar vein, I had heard so many tales about The Old County Tops through club members, I jumped at the opportunity to participate when asked to team up. A cracking long day out on the fells and I am now the very proud owner of the coveted event tee shirt! You can read a little more about Harry's and Josh's exploits on page 26.

My last major outing was to Durisdeer in the Scottish Borders for the British Championship counter. I enjoyed seeing familiar faces on the fell running circuit and naturally cursed when the Borrowdale Bandit (Mark Roberts) overtook me on the final climb up Well Hill! With such a strong pedigree of runners in the club, I am really keen to get more green and black vests on the starting line at the English and British Championships in 2023.

Before getting too far ahead of myself, the Captain's Corner gives me the perfect opportunity to plug a few of our very own fell races that are rapidly approaching this year, so get the dates in the diary now!

29-AUG-2022 **Dark Side Of The Combe**
24-SEP-2022 **Eskdale Show**
12-NOV-2022 **Dunnerdale**
26-NOV-2022 **Kirkby Moor**

Finally, I think you will all agree with me that the editor has done a marvellous job of putting together this wonderful publication. Robbie, you have set the bar very high!

I hope to see you all at a Tuesday Night Social Run very soon.

Matthew





GETTING TO THE START IS THE HARDEST PART

“I n 24 hours, you won’t hear me mention the Bob Graham round again,” I said as I left the house with walking poles in one hand and fell shoes in the other, before stepping back over the threshold of the back door to add jovially, “Well, except for a debrief of each leg!” There was a quietly audible sound as my husband’s eyes rolled in his COVID-throbbing head. I blew him a kiss, leaving him in his self-quarantined state, but sad that he was too ill to be part of my challenge.

On the drive to Keswick along the edge of Windemere, the sky was heavy with grey cloud,

forebodingly hugging the fell tops. I was still optimistic that MWIS had got the forecast right and that the rain storm was going to blow over by 9:30 pm, in good time for my 10 pm start. I don’t mind getting wet, but the thought of starting in the rain doesn’t sit easy with my southern genes. On the journey, I thought to myself: “This is the furthest I have got with my Bob Graham attempts — actually driving to Keswick!” I had cancelled my attempt the previous year, two months before my pencilled-in BG date, when I “tore” my medial collateral ligament in my knee hoovering, yes hoovering, and yes — it

sucked... It's a long story, involving overtraining, and sprinting up the Hoad from our house on tired legs to reprimand an irresponsible dog owner who'd let their dog bite my daughter's ankle whilst she was running. So, an overenthusiastic lunge movement whilst hoovering (yes, even household chores are training) resulted in a BG "No Go" and 5 months not running in the fells.

Then more recently, after a week of tapering, excitement, rest, kit preparation, nervous excited sleep visualising the route, my attempt of 11/12th June 2022 was "postponed due to adverse weather" thanks to the tail end of tropical Storm Alex. A good call: the forecasted 50 mph winds on the tops would have been no one's cuppa tea. So here I was, being chauffeured to the start by my father-in-law, who had stepped in as Nathan had tested positive for COVID earlier in the week. I had neurotically done three covid tests before I left, all negative, and it seemed my attempts to isolate from Nathan as soon as he had the shivers earlier in the week had paid off. I was fit to go.

Psychologically I was ready. The week-long postponement had turned out to be a good thing, the extra week of enforced rest, gentle runs and local dog walks had meant my body was physically prepared, and my mind was no longer mithering about kit preparation. The only thing I fussed about in the second week was getting a new support team who would be available to help out at extremely short notice.

"If you like a lot of chocolate on your biscuit, join the Club."

After an outing out around the Kentmere Horseshoe in early May with Holly, Dan and Annaliese, they asked me in the car on the way home when I was going to do my BG. I gave the normal response of "I don't know really, when I have done a bit more training." That evening I mentioned it to Nath. "When are you going to do it then? You're not going to get any fitter." So, after disagreeing with his later point, his work schedule was brought out and I pencilled in a

weekend that Nathan would be available for support team and to use his climbing skills for my inevitable Broadstand approach to Sca Fell. 5 weeks to go. The first step was made, a date. It was more than a notion: an actual date to work back from, to plan, prepare, a proverbial line in the sand — or the fells, in this case.

A few calls and Whatsapps later, I had my pacer team. The excitement and enthusiasm for the BG from Black Combe Runners was overwhelming and added further fuel to the fire to get myself prepared for the challenge. Beth Ripper suggested I speak to the "Club Gurus" on BG preparations — Hazel and Pete Taylor. Over a lovely cuppa tea and piece of 60th birthday cake, consumed with stunning views out across Morecambe Bay, Pete and Hazel gave me lots of advice and reminisced about BG rounds with a variety of club members. I came away psyched. Organise the kit, time your stops, don't stop moving and label bags! This 24-hour jaunt was going to need a mother of three children under four years old packing for a holiday style of military planning. The old saying "proper planning and preparation prevents piss poor performance" sprang to mind.

I opened up my emails, chuffed that Pete had sent me the excel spreadsheet, designed by Josh Hartley. It was perfect: distance, ascent, descent, splits, overall distance and climb, time to each of the 42 summits, 8200 m of ascent, 66 miles. It appealed greatly to the "mathsy science geek" and proved to be of great interest to my family and non-running friends who knew very little of the challenge. All I had to edit was the times, to slow them down to a 23-hour schedule (the timings obtained from the Bob Wightman BG schedule calculator) and change the colours — a new schedule was born! The Club had already provided everything I needed for my BG attempt: support, enthusiasm, advice, encouragement and pacers, and I hadn't even left the house. I really did feel I had a thick layer of chocolate on my biscuit! Join the club!

A 24-hour picnic

After a few evenings of fussing like a mother hen over her hatching brood, I prepared all the kit I need for each leg and for the four transitions. My 10 pm start would afford me a 6:30 am breakfast at Dunmail, a midday lunch at Wasdale and a 6 pm evening snack at Honister, so despite having to stay awake for an obscenely unusual amount of time, my body “meal wise” would be near normal, which I was keen to do to not disrupt any natural rhythms in the digestive system. My food choices were therefore similar to a virtually normal day: porridge, nuts and strawberries for breakfast and a hot pasta meal for lunch (beats the sandwiches I normally have in my lunchbox!). The running snack food consisted of nuts, dried fruit, a variety of chocolate bars, satsumas, bananas, some small ham or cheese wraps, chocolate tiffin and some Supernatural Fuel sachets. Once the food, including the highly coveted Booths chocolate tiffin, was in the house, it was promptly hidden in the spare room, to prevent consumption by my ever-hungry teenage sons. Each item of food was unpacked, packed, thinned out, repacked, unpacked and put in its “leg bag”, clearly labelled, along with some

ibuprofen pills and water purification tablets. I certainly wasn't going to risk getting any nasty bugs out of the stream — 1 tablet and wait 30 mins before consumption seems a small price to pay to avoid carrying any extra pathogen passengers around the BG too.

I was planning to run with my backpack with 2 x 250 ml squeeze bottles — one with water and one with SIS electrolyte solution, to ensure I was constantly replacing my salts and hopefully to increase my chances of avoiding cramp or dehydration. My pacers, or “domestiques”, in true Tour de France style, would hopefully carry my food, spare water and my “worse-case-scenario bag”, which contained my waterproof trousers, small down jacket, space blanket, spare shoelaces and some pre-cut strips of KT tape, just in case my knee played up.

I then prepared three lots of first aid kits, foot care, spare clothes and spare fell shoes to give to each of the different road supporters. John Evason was my Leg 2 pacer so he had a “change bag” of emergency spare clothes, cake and water. Hilary Ridgeway had kindly volunteered to be my crucial breakfast support at Dunmail, and my in-laws



At the start with Holly and Dan.

were at Wasdale for lunch; the 24-hour picnic was planned. Once all kit was ready and labelled for each changeover point, I met up with my support team to get the kit out of BG HQ, aka the spare room, which was where I was currently taking refuge from the COVID bug, so that I could sleep with a clear conscience that I had organised as much as I could. It was now all down to the weather and good luck.

Le grand départ

Moot Hall in the centre of Keswick was buzzing. The earlier rain had stopped and there were patches of blue sky overhead as the weather front had blown to the west. The forecast had said 'feels like -1 °C on the summits and wind gusting to 30 mph, so I didn't go for the shorts option! I was excited for the start, but also so happy to see my good friend Carl, who had driven up from Sheffield to see me off, before joining me for Leg 3. There was a large group of fell-running-looking people posing for photos by the famous Moot Hall door, and other teams of runners loitering about waiting. It looked like a 10 pm start on the Friday evening closest to the longest day of the year was a busy start time. I was temporarily concerned I would be following someone all the way round, so I went over and chatted to a group of men with head torches on, assuming they were preparing to set off into the fells rather than heading out on a pub crawl of Keswick. Their runner was on a 22-hour schedule, so I guessed he'd be a fair bit ahead.

Ten, nine, eight... there were enough people milling around in the crowd for a big countdown to a 10 pm off — I had to restrain the extrovert in me from getting the onlookers to shout out the seconds. I looked across at Dan Hartley, and he was quietly saying the numbers whilst looking up at me and the "22 hour man" on the steps. The other teams were starting by the door. Holly Orr and I weren't sure of the BG etiquette — door or top of the steps for the start? — but to avoid any hustle and bustle from the other teams, I went steps.

Seven, six, five, four... The seconds didn't seem quick enough.

Three, two, one, go... We were off. The crowd clapped and cheered loudly. That was more like it. Holly, Dan and I, through the narrow ginnel, ensuring not to get tangled up with any other groups or walking poles, across the car park into Fitz Park and 22-hour man had gone. He certainly set off quick. I needn't have worried: all the way up Skiddaw we weren't surrounded by any other groups. It literally did feel like we were the only ones on the fell, soaking up the mellow seacoast setting sun into the darkness of the summit.

"Counting peaks — it's a bit like counting sheep"

"Number 1," I declared at the Skiddaw summit. "Hoorah!" I did a celebratory dance (it was bigger and more flamboyant in my head), zipped up my gortex to protect me from the chill of the strong summit breeze, and continued along the ridge, before we dropped off northerly into lee of the wind, over the wooden style and in to the great vacuumous heathery bog. "Right a bit," Dan instructed us, in a vain attempt to find a trod that wasn't going to suck us down into the dark, muddy abyss. It was futile. No matter how carefully you attempted a foot placement, the bog was out to get these head-torched midnight runners. My left leg sank up to my thigh and I was flung forward. Picking myself up, I was pleased I'd got leggings on to dry quick and keep me warm in the cool night air. Unfortunately, Dan didn't seem to possess the ability to magically levitate above the heathery bog either and hurt his ankle in the dark murkiness.

We were soon at the summit of Great Calva. I held up the tracker, which was taped to my running chest rig, to the sky: "Pick that up, satellite." I imagined Nathan was still awake, no doubt dot-watching my progress. As we were going up Skiddaw, Dan's watch was pinging with messages that the tracker wasn't working. The tracker was glowing green, so we assumed it was communicating with the satellite, the technology just needed time to adjust to us moving I suppose. Another couple of runners were behind



Leg 2 sunrise

us at the fence corner on the south end of Great Calva, and we met Dan there, who was determined we plod on without him. It felt wrong leaving a man behind on the mountains, and I worried about it as we descended the hill. Abandoning an injured team member wasn't what I normally would have done — perhaps this was all a rather selfish pursuit for access to an arbitrary club. I was determined not to have the other pair of runners following us all the way to Threkeld, so we jogged on down on the left-hand side of the fence line to the valley bottom and crossed the river Caldew easily at the well-worn trod. Time for my Boost bar up Blencathra; chatting away, I hardly noticed the ascent. When I looked back, the two runners didn't seem behind us anymore; we were back to having the fell to ourselves. Peak 3, Blencathra, and we started our descent of the razor edge of Halls Fell. For some reason, I subconsciously didn't like the rockiness in the thinness of the head torch beam and so peeled off right down a more runnable grassy section. It was a bit daft to not follow the ridge but my gut instinct was to avoid it, despite having descended the route a few times in the daylight, although not recently, so my confidence wasn't there. We skirted just left of the ridge, re-joining it in places, before Holly corrected my error and put me back on the right track by contouring around to the main descent path again. Hindsight is a wonderful thing: I definitely should have reced that descent in the dark, rather than taking my normal blasé attitude of "I've done it in the day — it's

fine." The darkness of the night always plays tricks with the mind.

In the Threkeld cricket club car park, John Evason and Rob Browne were waiting for us with the boot open. Peering inside, I saw a 40th Birthday cake. "Who's 40?" I said, before realising I really should keep my thoughts in my head, as it was quite obvious it wasn't Rob — if he were 40 that would make me, his old Science teacher, really aged! "Happy Birthday John". Gosh, people have made big scarifies to come to meet me at 1:45! I felt honoured that they had both volunteered to step in and help me on leg 2 at such extremely short notice, as Pat McIver, who had volunteered for the rescheduled date, had also unfortunately succumbed to COVID a few days before. It clearly is a virus not willing to mutate out of harm's way just yet.

It was only my Petzl head torch that I was extremely disappointed with, as it had turned itself off on the rocky descent of Halls Fell and was continually flickering. John had a decent spare (it looked better than my spare one) so he grabbed that, they kindly refilled my water bottles and I kept all other kit the same. I literally stuffed in two piece of lemon drizzle cake, had a good drink of water, then off we went, waving goodbye to Holly and hoping Dan was ok.

It was a steady climb up Clough Head, conversation taking my mind off the ascent. I was hopeful of seeing the rare celestial planetary alignment of the inner planets, Jupiter and Saturn, which was meant to be visible due south from 1 am that morning just above the horizon. As we crested onto Clough Head's grassy ridge, I was excited that you could definitely see at least two planets in the cloud-speckled night sky. Jupiter was the largest by far, reflecting the sun's light extremely brightly. In a diagonal line down towards the horizon, I guessed the other bright object was Venus, the morning star. I felt small, insignificantly small, as I looked into the night sky and felt privileged to be healthy enough to be out here seeing this on the hills. The Lake District clouds weren't going to allow a full view of this event, which only happens every forty years,

but I was pleased to have seen the King of the Gods as I touched the cairn. Four. Counting hills was superfluous — it's a bit like counting sheep, as the more you count the more tired you get.

“Why haven't I done this before?”

The forecast was right, -1 °C and 30 mph winds. There was a chilling breeze on the ridge running through the Dodds to Hellvelyn. Fortunately, Rob's long legs kept me at a good pace, which kept me warm. We passed numerous groups of tents camped on the tops and cols. They must have had a stream of head torch beams through the thin canvas of their tents going past them all night, camping on the Bob Graham route. I wondered if they noticed.

John and Rob pandered to my every need, frequently offering me refills and food. I kept on plodding, snacking little bits on the ups. They were a walking bistro, offering me a selection of culinary delights, a few nuts, dried strawberries and a juicy satsuma. When packing, I thought it would be hard to know what I'd fancy on the hills. I had raided the unused NHS COVID testing kits we had spare in the house for the mini plastic bags; you know the ones which you were meant to put the used kit in for disposal. They were used as portion bags, which worked well for storage of loose food (nuts and dried



Changeover at Dunmail Raise

mango) but I wasn't sure if they were that easy for the “domestiques” to open. I realised the cereal bar I had packed was now ballast in the pacers' bags; there was little chance of me eating it, far too dry. Keep moving, eat and stride uphill. We seemed to be gaining time on the schedule, which was a psychological boost to the ego, if nothing else.

Why haven't I been up at 3 am before on a clear night? It was absolutely stunning, breathtaking. The sun slowly rising to the east, its low rays radiating just above the horizon and reflecting in Ullswater, making it glow crimson, the clouds a rosy hue. We really do live in the most stunning place. Yet again, I was feeling privileged to witness the sheer beauty of our home.

The knees started to feel tight on the descent off Fairfield. I guess it was to be expected after over 3367 m of ascent and descent and 36.6 km (got that off the spreadsheet — thanks Josh!). We all shared some chocolate tiffin, a treat and a little power boost for the climb up Seat Sandal. “Guess who we have been following on leg two,” John said. “Well, no one,” I thought. The only person we have seen is “22-hour man” as he was descending Fairfield while we were ascending. “Kilian Jornet!” John had downloaded KJs' leg 2 trace onto his watch. As we jogged off Seat Sandal, we all marvelled at Jornet's phenomenal running ability, and I thought that this was the closest I would ever get to being an elite athlete, following in his footsteps. As my knees held on, I was looking forward to a sit down at Dunmail.

“Highway to the Danger Zone” — well, Scafell

You know someone is a true friend if they are “willing” to retape your muddy, hot feet and smear them in vaseline, whilst you sit leisurely in a deckchair eating your breakfast. It was great to see Carl.

Hilary had done a sterling job of prepping my Taylor's Rich Italian black coffee (never skimp!) and porridge; it was possibly the tastiest those Quakers Oat So Simple porridge oats had ever been. It was a hive of activity at the change-over point, whilst battling the

midges away that seemed to have swarmed poor Hilary and the van. I had four men fussing over me, which certainly was a novelty, refilling electrolyte and water bottles, exchanging kit, whilst I concentrated on eating quickly and changing my socks.

Nathan had recommended I tape my feet. I don't normally for running, but on such a long distance it wouldn't take much for the smallest of blisters to form and make the journey uncomfortable. So, I applied 5 cm zinc oxide tape to my heels, covering to just above the back rim of the fell shoe, leaving no skin uncovered and smearing the whole lot in vaseline, before a fresh pair of socks was put on. It was clearly a successful method, with fresh taping at Wasdale too, as I never had any foot issues the whole day.

Refuelled and ready for the next mission in to the Langdales and Sca Fell, I crossed the wooden stile, 16 minutes up on schedule, and strode up Steel Fell with my "wingmen", Harry and Carl.

I love leg 3 — it's a great journey: a short pull up Steel Fell, weaving a path through bogginess towards Calf Crag, the pull up to the small pointy peak of Sergeant Man, to the panoramic vista of the Bob route from the top of High Raise, then skimming the tops of the Langdales on a highway of rockiness to Sca Fell, before the descent into stunning Wasdale. It didn't disappoint.

"What's the time?" I asked. Harry said it was 8:30 am. Time becomes irrelevant — it felt more like two in the afternoon. "Can I have more Ibuprofen yet?". I didn't want to sound like a drug addict, but the knees were still achy. Dr Carl then explained all about the daily dosing intake and efficacy, and effects on the body, all whilst skipping effortlessly downhill towards the second wettest part of the BG round, Martcrag Moor. It was more the overall daily dose that should be considered rather than the time interval between doses, he concluded, before falling literally up to his waist in the bog. "So can she have some then?" Harry asked as he offered a helping hand to pull Carl out, who was glad that he had retied his shoe laces a couple of minutes before being sucked into

the quagmire. I had difficulty swallowing the two pills whilst we all laughed at the comedy of the situation.

Using sheep as a navigation aid is never normally the best mode of successful route finding. As we trotted off Rossett Pike towards Bowfell, the "boys" were ahead slightly, Carl reminiscing about finding the trod on recces for his own BG and how hard it can be to spot without any obvious cairns. I think the sheep move them. They came to a stop. "Which way?" "Follow that Herdwick," I replied. You know you are a local when the Herdwick Hogg is the perfect route marker. It was standing right on the trod, just above us, higher up the stream, which led us onto a faint path that handrails the bottom of the craggy fault line all the way to the small col just before Bowfell.

At Bowfell you have already climbed the same height as Mont Blanc from sea level and it is a definite key marker of the round. Just over half way. The half way point is actually the insignificant Thurnacar Knott, which you summit without too much excitement. Bowfell is the start of the fun part; the grassy fells give way to rocky mountainous terrain as the highway to Scafell begins.

Esk Pike, Great End, Ill Crag... We told stories, giggled over the rocks, scrambled the short descent off Broad Crag and onto England's highest summit. I was enjoying my morning jaunt with great company. I was so disappointed that Nath was too ill to climb the stairs without dizziness, let alone walk uphill, so despite his optimism that he'd be better by the weekend, my Broadstand approach was off. I was



Changeover at Wasdale Head



On Leg 4

hoping to have a whimsical Coleridge moment, but rather than his dangerous poetic descent, mine was purely for time, to take the quickest route to the summit. The alternative route I chose was Lord's Rake and the West Wall Traverse. Steeped in climbing history, the towering rock faces on either side of us, we scrambled up the red gully to break out onto Sca Fell's plateau. Coleridge's words seemed applicable now on the summit of Sca Fell: "fantastic Pleasure, that draws the Soul along swimming through the air in many shapes, even as a Flight of Starlings in a Wind".

I was inwardly gutted that my knees were sore, as I knew that normally I could descend Sca Fell at a faster pace than I was, my poles helping to take some of the pressure off my ligaments. I knew I had to leave something in reserve — I still had 2600 m and 34 km to go. The scree descent was such fun; it was great to just let the legs glide forward without any pressure on the knees, the tiny stones that collected in my shoes were a small price to pay for the sheer childish glee it was descending it. Harry ran ahead to meet my support crew and put in my drinks and pills order. Leg 3 with Harry and Carl had been great fun. What a grand day out!

At Wasdale, my in-laws, Sally and Kev, were absolute stars; my tasty tuna tortellini and black coffee were just the right temperature. It was lovely to see them and I was glad they were keen to support me on this crazy idea of mine. Tim was clock-watching and eager for me not to stay long. I sat in the deck chair, happy, retaped my feet and ate, listening to the bubbling excitement of my team, eager to go. I started leg 4 a "new woman", fresh T-shirt, socks and shoes, and a clean baby-wiped face — classy!

The only way is up

Tim led the way, followed by the "entertainment team and DPS ("Dog Positioning System") of Mae and Pip. Carl, Neil, Tim and I — we were a merry band taking in the high points of leg 4. Neil, my brother-in-law, had driven up from the warm flat lands of Cambridge the night before, and remarked how Tim was wearing a vest and shorts, whilst he had been waiting at Wasdale with a Rab Jacket on. It was the north-south divide. The visibility was excellent; the views on leg 4 are simply stunning across Wasdale, Ennerdale and out to sea. I was pleased for Neil that he was experiencing the Lake District at its finest.



Touching the final summit, Robinson

By Red Pike, I had gone off the idea of chewing food. Throughout the day, all my pacers had done a sterling job of keeping me fuelled. I had no energy drops or lulls, and the proper food at Wasdale was keeping me powered for quite some time too. I had purchased some Supernatural Food sachets after reading a club email sent round by Tim. I was sold by their product endorsements by athletes such as Beth Pascall, as allegedly they helped avoid stomach issues on long events. The sachets have the consistency of puréed food and are in pouches so are easy to squirt into your mouth, and most importantly you don't need to chew them. I had taken one on each leg so far, and my stomach was fine. There were 3 flavours I tried: Oats, Banana and Maple Syrup — palatable; Cocoa and Banana — an acquired taste (which I only had a couple of mouthfuls of before passing it back to Harry,

unimpressed); and Berry and Quinoa. On leg 1, I could taste the sweetness of the berries, and the quinoa gave it some texture, which was nice. By leg 4 my taste buds must have given up, as I now referred to it as “Berry and Grit” — perhaps I am not the best brand ambassador.

Tim offered me a pink Mountain Fuel drink; as I drank it, I could feel the energy going in — it was the absolute best!. He also kindly offered me some Mountain Fuel gels, virtually tasteless with a hint of lime, which seemed more palatable to my tiring body. The lumbar region of my back became sore as the mileage increased, so I handed the poles to Carl and ascended Great Gable, palms either side of my spine, pushing my lower back to try and support it. “The only way is up, Baby for you and me now!” That cheesy classic 80s Yazoo song was an ear-worm I couldn't remove as we ticked off the summits,

entertained by anecdotal stories from my friends and the silly antics of the DPS. I arrived at Grey Knots in good spirits.

“Paracetamol, ibuprofen, flat coke and chocolate tiffin please.” I put my order in, as Tim and Carl ran off to meet the support crew at Honister pass. As I descended the very runnable grassy fellside, at a frustratingly slow pace, I could see everyone waiting for my arrival. Was that Nathan’s motorbike? I held back my emotional tears, excited that my husband was able to come and see me. Stay strong.

Girl Power

Sugared up, I reached the impressive stone cairn of Dale Head accompanied by Beth Ripper and Neil, who decided to continue on for the “Glory Leg”. I took a leisurely jog to Hindscarth, taking in the beautiful view of Buttermere, then made the short pull up to the last summit — Robinson. I knew not to rest on my laurels here, as even though the 23-hour schedule allows for walking pace between the final three peaks of the round, you still have to jog in the road section to get sub-23. Beth showed us a decent descent off Robinson, avoiding the rocky section on the marked footpath, which if I hadn’t been moving for 21 hours or more would have been a very quick runnable route choice. It was fantastic to have her experience and her bubbly company for the final leg as we descended along Scope Beck to Little Town. “Girl Power — yay!”

The day had certainly warmed up, in the valley out of the wind. Nath met us on the CCM and I got changed into shorts and T-shirt, and donned my HOKAs. Mmm so bouncy, so comfy. The final 4.5-mile undulating road section was relaxed; after a cool day on the fells it felt like summer. We were cheered on by Beth’s family at Swinside. The support spurred on the pace — it was great to feel like I was actually



At the finish with Neil and Beth

running again. As I entered the high street in Keswick, I picked up the tempo, applauded by the crowd, and jogged up the steps of Moot Hall. End. Happy days.

As I hugged everyone, The Round pub came out and gave me a congratulatory pint of beer. A lovely gesture. I had a sip and knew its consumption would be a challenge too far. “Drinking that pint — now that would put you out of your comfort zone.” We all laughed.

A very big thank you to everyone who helped me achieve my goal; you are all wonderful people who made it a perfect adventure. Grateful appreciation to all members of Black Combe runners who offered their support for the previous scheduled attempts too — what a great club, thanks to you all. The Bob Graham Round is a day of running, happiness and friendship I will always cherish. 22 hours 15 minutes of pure fun. Getting to the start is definitely the hardest part.

Classic Fell Race

First Timers

by Emma Seery



BCR organises some amazing fell races: Black Combe, Caw, Dark Side of the Combe, Eskdale Show, Dunnerdale and Kirkby Moor. These events inspire hundreds of people to run, walk, and crawl their way across our local hills. We also have an annual championship that lines up a tantalising array of short, medium, and long races, to get us out doing more of the same.

Everyone in the club is encouraged to get involved — whether you're winning prizes or out for the longest run of the day.

So here's an insight into some of this year's Champs races from BCR folk who did them for the first time this year. Why not get some races in the diary for 2022 folks? The more black and green vests out on the hill the better!

Black Combe Fell Race — March (MEDIUM)

Viv Riley

Black Combe Fell Race... hmm, that's a race for the proper fell runners right? The super fit, those who run every day, know every trod and swamp, sprint uphill and fly down technical terrain faster than I can cycle it! I've helped and spectated at the race, but never thought I was good enough to take part.

This year I thought it was time to cast away my feelings of self-doubt. The thought didn't go away, so I did the honourable thing and entered the famous Black Combe Fell Race — eek. That's it — I'm committed. Surprisingly, I felt quite excited, telling myself I've got this, I can do it. After all, I'd



managed to run most of the BCR winter league races and I was feeling 'relatively' fit. I just needed to keep my fitness up and squeeze in a recce or two. Surely, it's just the Dunnerdale + a park run with 2 big ups and downs instead of 4 smaller ones.

My first recce... suss out the section up to the South Summit as I didn't know that bit. When I mentioned it to anyone, they'd say, "Ah yes, the beehive on the South Summit; you can't miss it." I never did find the South Summit that day. After slogging uphill (walking), the weather clagged in, the top of the Combe disappeared, the wind picked up and brought driving rain. I found myself wandering around trying to stay upright and read my compass whilst looking for a beehive. Getting cold (I'd only 'run' from Rallis to Stream Junction, and I was dressed for running... 'fell running!'), I decided to head off in the direction towards the main path (which I did find!).

Despite finding the elusive South Summit incident hilarious, it was time to get a grip. A full route recce with Jackie and 4-legged Rhu leading the way — a lovely trip out. I managed to keep up but was grateful for a breather when Rhu needed some food and water at White Combe. I think we messed up the line down to the stream junction, but I got the gist! I discovered there really is a beehive on the South Summit — at last things were coming together nicely!

Two weeks to go; my third and final recce, with Emma. A different route up Seaness (oh no, decisions!), compass bearings logged in my head, still not quite the right route down to stream junction (must do better on the day), straight to the beehive. Finally I was starting to feel like a fell runner.

Race day brought sunshine, jelly wobbles, excitement, and a bundle of 'what if's'. As I was too busy nervously chatting and tying and untying my shoelaces to get a proper warm up done, the start felt a fast pace (tut, tut, note to self to warm up properly next time). Once up the first climb, any remaining traces of self-doubt vanished, all the happier to be surrounded by others huffing and puffing as much as me! I soon settled in and loved every minute; even tripping up in the swamp made me chuckle.

Best advice (from Emma): 'Rest, eat well, turn up with a sense of humour and do your best.'

Best bits (apart from finishing): speeding ahead through the heather and easily losing the 2 runners following me on the last section; quote "she's local (BCR vest) — follow her". Finishing 3 minutes quicker than my guesstimated time to achieve!

Would I do it again? Yes definitely.

Next up: Kirkby Fell Race in November and maybe next year I'll brave Caw to bag one more of the BCR-organised races.

Result: 2 hours 11 mins and 8 seconds. 195th / 217



Eskdale Elevation — early April (LONG)

Ava Grossman

Although I've lived at the mouth of the Eskdale valley since 2017, I had no idea that there was a fell race nearby (granted it's only been running since 2019). It's a credit to BCR and the champs race series that I realised this incredible gem existed. Having only run my first ever fell race in September 2021 — and coming dead last in a field of 15 — I wasn't sure I could finish the 12-13 mile, 3000 feet race that dauntingly includes Scafell. Given that so many of our club regularly undertake 20+ mile runs for fun, I wasn't sure that their confident encouragement was warranted. For me, 15 miles was sort of my maximum distance, and saying that this was based on my dog's limitations was just an excuse for my lack of endurance. After a couple of recces I was pretty convinced. One of the reasons I love Eskdale so much is its boundless tussocks and wilderness like rolling hills. I was also excited that local knowledge might give me an edge, albeit one that took me from dead last to slightly farther forward in the field.

By this point, I had also completed the Black Combe fell race, Muncaster Luck and Jarrett's Jaunt so I was feeling a little bit more confidence. Having said that, it's only because of BCR's encouragement that I had entered these too!

The race is very simple: 3 checkpoints plus the start and finish. Boot Inn, Whin Rigg summit, Scafell summit, Eel Tarn and back to Boot. Lots of familiar faces at the start line including a big BCR contingent helped to ease my nerves. I had planned to take a straight line across the tussocks instead of sticking to the path to the standing stones, but immediately felt I may have made the wrong choice as I realised how much slower I was than the people around me. Trying not to get down early in the race, I carried on, and enjoyed the welcome downhill spin to the bottom of Whin Rigg. The slog up was the hardest part for me as I'm not a great climber and it's pretty unrelenting.

Finally I found my feet contouring along Illgill Head, down to Burnmoor and started the climb to Scafell. I really enjoyed this part as I felt I could move quickly enough to overtake a few people and I was getting excited about the run to the tarn. The final section I had recce'd a few times and knew my best bet was to take my bearing from Scafell summit and follow it all the way.

This worked well and I seemed to lose and find people all over the show. The final run down the track and road to Boot felt like a victory lap — all the hard work done and just the final sprint. Seeing so many BCR folks at the finish made it all worth it, despite some of them being a bit bloody. The atmosphere amongst the finishers was full of chat about lines, tussocks, and when we were getting beer. Definitely a warm glow that's kept me excited to give it another go!

Huge thanks to all of BCR for making it seem possible for newbies like me to take part.



Coniston Fell Race — late April (MEDIUM)

Robbie Driscoll

Although I'm still fairly new to fell racing, I'd wanted to do the Coniston fell race for a while. It's not a BCR-organised race, but it definitely feels like 'home turf', and many social runs had been spent debating the lines and trying out various routes off the top of the Old Man. One of the first proper fell runs I ever did was the Coniston Horseshoe, so I liked the idea of giving the route a go in proper race conditions to see how much I'd improved. What I like so much about the route is that it has a bit of everything: there's a long, slow, grassy climb up to Wetherlam, a rocky scramble up Prison Band, a fast ridge run over to the Old Man, and finally a hell-for-leather descent all the way back to the start. To borrow a phrase from Josh Hartley, it's an "absolute belter".

With the race back on for the first time since 2019, there was a good turnout from BCR, which meant there was plenty of friendly rivalry between those in green and black. On short and medium races, I always have a good battle with captain Matalan, and Coniston was no exception. After managing to hold him off on the climb up Wetherlam, he overtook me on Prison Band, then we traded places again near the summit of the Old Man, and again on the descent. To add to the chaos, Tim, who had disappeared into the distance after Wetherlam, suddenly appeared from behind me in the last mile, having clearly gone a bit awry on the descent. In a lung-busting run into the finish, I managed to get ahead of Matthew but couldn't hold off Tim, the three of us separated by just forty seconds on the line.

I would recommend the race to anyone who wants to experience a classic medium-distance fell race with a bit of everything thrown in, and it's an easy one to get out and recce if you live in the South Lakeland area. I'm already thinking about nailing some of those racing lines for next year...



Long Duddon — early June (LONG)

Emma Seery

This year I did the Long Duddon for the first time. It was awesome. In both the 'wooo hooo, this is amazing!'; and the 'overwhelming / this feels like a scary thing to sign up for' sense of the word.

It's testament to the friendliness and infectious craziness of Black Combe Runners that I even thought about doing this race. Ok, and maybe a bit of my own personal craziness.

I did my first fell race last summer — the Torver show, which is a (relatively speaking) quick up and down the Old Man. Then I thought I'd be bold and enter the short (not that short) Duddon, which I was pretty intimidated by to be honest. Would I be dead last, and be an embarrassment to the BCR vest? Unfortunately I managed to twist my ankle climbing the night before the race, so I spent the day hobbling around cheering instead of racing, but I also went to wave off the 'superhuman' Long Duddon folk. Where a seed was planted...

I saw Jon Bailey (of 52 times up and down the Combe for fun fame) setting off on the Long, and knew he'd be running at a similar pace to me, and would be out for a longer day than lots of others on the start line. I thought that was so impressive, and it made me wonder if I'd have the guts to give it a go. So thank you John for the inspiration!



The race is long and tough. For me it was 28 km and 1865 m of climbing. It's also a beautiful tour of the Duddon valley, travelling over Harter Fell, Hard Knott, Little Stand (not little!), Swirl How, Dow Crag, White Pike, and Caw.

The best thing I did to prep was to recce the parts of the route I didn't know, and to have a plan for the lines I'd take on the final section when I knew I'd be tired. Between the 3 Shires Stone and the end, when I definitely wasn't at my most bouncy, I still managed to overtake a dozen people because I knew exactly where I was going. That felt pretty good. The worst moment was dropping all my jelly babies after the descent from Harter Fell. It was just too early in the race to sacrifice them, so I had to watch people I'd just overtaken fly past me while I scabbled around in the grass rescuing my fallen soldiers... Good decision though!! Best moment was topping out on Caw, when I knew I'd made the final cut off and it really was all downhill from there.

I'm not the fastest runner, but I really don't think that matters. At the end I was beaming. I felt like a hero for finishing, and I was proud to come in 103rd out of 119 finishers, because this was a massive achievement for me. And also because I'd had a beautiful day out on our local fells, seen Eleanor, Gav, Kev and others do the same event for the first time, and got to recover afterwards with beers and friends in the sunshine. Top day.



BCR Old Codgers & Recoverers — an Inspiration

by Dave Watson

Somebody said, “Get back running Dave... You’ll love it!” They said that Old Codger Rob (sorry Rob) had got a group going on a Tuesday morning and that it would be fun!

I used to run you know... Orienteering, road races, fell races, mountain marathons, Coniston 14 umpteen times, Isle of Man 40, even London... but it all went very wrong one winter league at Roanhead, and I just couldn’t do it anymore.

So I packed up running and concentrated on bike riding — just for fun.

However, the desire to run was never far away and, eventually, after sorting my body (and mind!) out, I thought I’d give it a go.

Of course, there were all kinds of setbacks restarting running, mostly from “running” too far too soon or trying to match others that I used to run with but could no longer match!

I realised the thing to do was run what I wanted to, when I wanted to, at my pace, and not try to run with the Tuesday evening gang until I’m ready... and that’s where the Tuesday morning group is so good — always regrouping, always stopping for a chat at memorable points. “You want to turn back or run shorter? That’s fine!”

We’ve had a goodly number of participants: Rob, Phil, Dave P., Claire, Kath, Jane, Gill, Val, Mike J, myself (I’ve probably missed some) and several doggies!

Everyone is welcome — the main rule is ‘run at the pace of the slowest’.

If you want to join in, great! Keep your eye on the BCR chat and emails and just turn up. It’ll be a 3- to 6-mile effort, probably with some hills, almost always on offroad paths and tracks... and just maybe a coffee after as a reward!

I’ve even signed up for park runs!

Thanks for being inspirational Rob — Dunnerdale here we come!



WINTER LEAGUE ROUNDUP

This January and February saw the return of the Winter League, as runners tackled seven fantastic courses in a series of hotly contested handicapped races.

Beginning with a reverse of the Dunnerdale race route on New Year's Day, those taking part faced everything the Cumbrian winter had to throw at them, from gale force winds around Devoke Water to heavy snow at Blawith.

There was lots of good-natured competitive spirit, a great turnout at many of the races, and surprisingly few people getting lost, so the series can only be considered a great success!

A big thanks must go to all the organisers who gave up their time to flag the courses, get everyone off at the right time and do their best to keep track of who finished when!

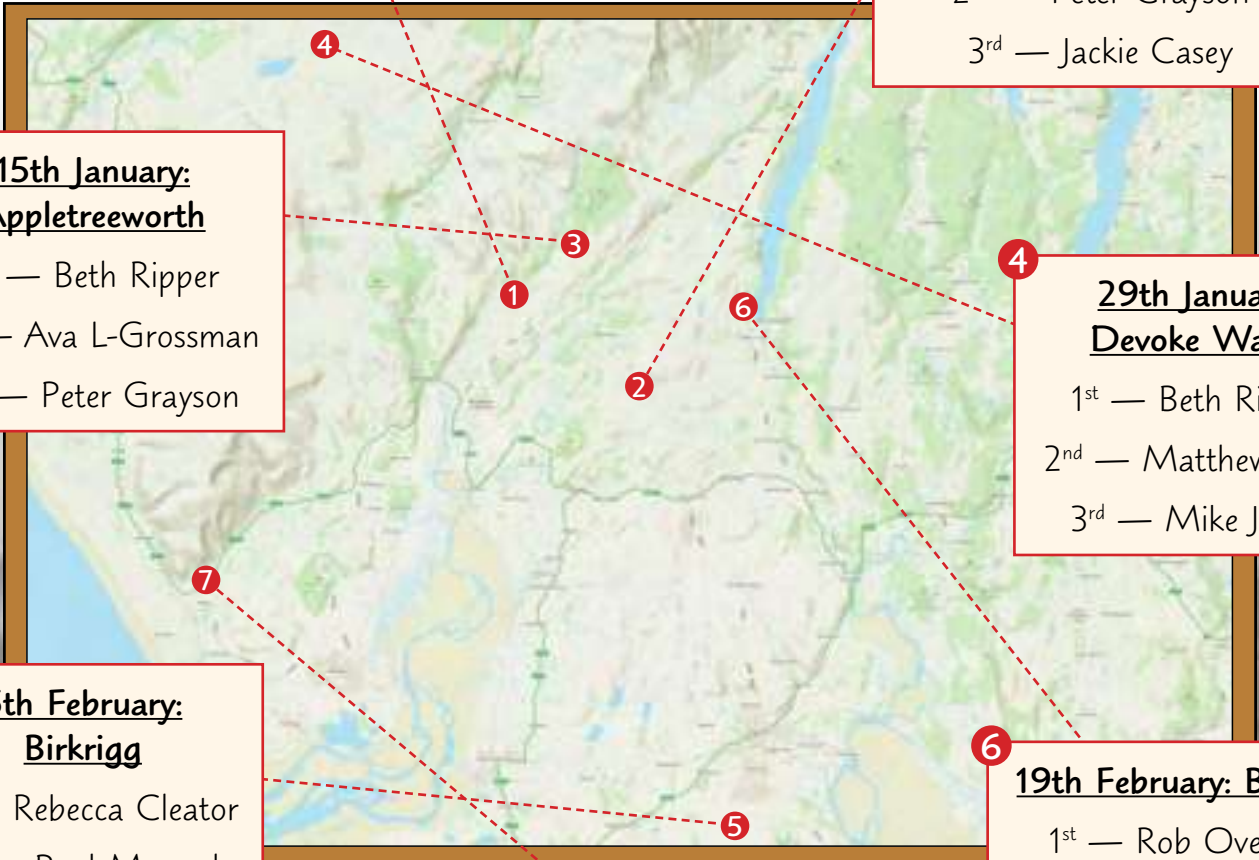


1
1st January: Reverse Dunnerdale
1st — Peter Grayson
2nd — Jeff Bailey
3rd — Jackie Casey

2
8th January: Giant's Grave
1st — Beth Ripper
2nd — Peter Grayson
3rd — Jackie Casey

3
15th January: Appletreeworth
1st — Beth Ripper
2nd — Ava L-Grossman
3rd — Peter Grayson

4
29th January: Devoke Water
1st — Beth Ripper
2nd — Matthew Allen
3rd — Mike Jewell



5
5th February: Birkrigg
1st — Rebecca Cleator
2nd — Paul Managh
3rd — Beth Ripper

6
19th February: Blawith
1st — Rob Overton
2nd — Ava L-Grossman
3rd — Will Silvie

7
26th February: Black Combe
1st — Beth Ripper
2nd — Peter Grayson
3rd — Emma Seery



AND THE WINNER IS...

Congratulations to **Beth Ripper**, who stormed to victory, winning four out of the seven races. Turn over to read Beth's account of how it went.

She was pushed all the way, however, by runner-up **Peter Grayson**, who rolled back the years to secure a top six finish in every race in the series.

Based on finishing positions in their best four races, third place was a tie between **Jackie Casey** and **Rebecca Cleator**. Well done all!

PUTTING THE WIN INTO WINTER LEAGUE!

by Beth Ripper

I thought I'd share some of my secrets for success after a most unexpected win at this year's Black Combe Winter League! I'm guessing that I'll forever be granted an horrific handicap, so no harm in spilling the beans on my strict training regime and top tips for trouncing the competition (sorry Peter Grayson, you were pretty amazing this year!).

1. In the Months Leading Up to the League...

Undoubtedly, the best way to prepare is to set your alarm to randomly wake you every night in the months prior to the league commencing. 45-90 minute intervals are optimal to replicate my successful pre-league preparations. You can choose a nice soothing alarm sound, or an ear-splitting, soul-destroying scream — your choice. For superior preparation, you can undertake the complementary nocturnal weight training: bounce a 10 kg weight each time your alarm goes off. This must be done in complete darkness. When your arms are shaking, your back is aching and you think you can't hold the weight anymore, you're only just beginning....



One of my favourite dumbbells

2. Influence your Handicap

Slowly, slowly for Round 1. Your objective for the first race is to have the best disaster imaginable. Your aim is to finish in the bottom 5 at the end of Round 1.

Then you can hope for a favourable handicap alteration for the remainder of the series.

(Fingers crossed). To achieve this, I would highly recommend my tactics for this year — indulge in plentiful, guilt-free Christmas consumption; don't hold back on those mince pies. Also try to arrange for a good old winter cold to coincide with your first race and fully scupper any attempts at breathing whilst you run. Good luck.

3. Race day preparation

I was going to write something here about travelling light during the race and the value of a plentiful supply of dog poo bags, but Tim said it was TMI so I'll just let you fill in the blanks.

4. Psyche out the competition

Wear your most inappropriately short fell running shorts for the coldest winter league race (ideally something snowy and windy around Blawith). They'll think you're really hard core, when actually you just forgot your three quarters. Also, practise your aeroplane wings — a great way to hold off the competition on a sprint finish (though the most committed adversaries may still dive into the brambles and sacrifice a brand new running jacket to secure a draw... eek...).



5. Breathing technique

Practice holding your breath for 15 minutes at a time. This will prepare you adequately for the final Black Combe race descent, when you will have a stitch as soon as you leave the summit and are unable to breathe again until you finish in a heap at James's feet by Whicham Church some time later.

6. Post race recovery

I would seriously recommend a half full English at the Square café in Broughton, followed by at least an hour standing in the freezing cold at a playground of your choice. The DOMS from Black Combe will be severe and last for a week, but the win will be worth it. :)

Thanks as always to Matalan and all flaggers, timers, runners and café stoppers for another super fun winter league. Really enjoyed it!! :)

Beth x



MAKING A SPLASH

ON THE FROG GRAHAM ROUND

BY KEVIN BROOKS



Last year, I failed to complete the Frog Graham Round.

The round is split into four legs. Each leg has a section of fell running with various summits and a lake swim. Like its namesake, the more familiar and respectable Bob Graham Round, you start and finish at the Keswick Moot Hall and you can travel in either direction. However, there is no time limit for “the Frog” but you do need to complete it in one continuous journey. The idea is that you have a lovely big day out

on the fells and in the lakes for which you are self-sufficient. In total it is about 40 miles of running, 2 miles of swimming and 4300 metres of undulation.

In 2021 I got myself a copy of the route map and started swimming in Coniston Water after work to get myself used to open water swimming. I went on a few swim-hikes to figure out what kit I would need. Early on I would carry my wetsuit in a bag-for-life that was attached to a rucksack with bungees. I needed better kit. I bought

myself a swimrun wetsuit and a lightweight rucksack that would double as a tow float. I started to recce the route:

Leg one is a very simple route from Keswick over Skiddaw and across Bassenthwaite. Leg two needs more careful navigation to get you up Barf and some lesser tops, through Winlatter Forest, over Grisedale Pike and Eel crag and down across Crummock Water. Leg three is shortest but still tough, going straight up Mellbreak onto Red Pike, High Style and Buttermere. Leg four is most runnable: once you're up Robinson it's on to Dale Head, High Spy and Catbells, then across Derwentwater and back to Keswick.

First time around I didn't have a plan. Early July 2021 was sunny and I'd had an easy week at work so I thought I should attempt the round. It was hot. Too hot to be running on the fells in the daytime. So I decided to go at night. My first round: solo, unsupported and in the dark — what could go wrong? Setting off at 7 pm got me across Bassenthwaite at dusk; I walked all of leg two in the dark and swam across Crummock Water at first light. Leg three was the only leg I hadn't reced and Mellbreak was tough. I fell asleep on High Stile (I'd been awake for 24 hours by then) so by the time I got across Buttermere I had lost momentum. Maybe I could have carried on as it was only 10 in the morning. I could have walked leg four, completing a continuous round, and put it all behind me. But I didn't think I'd enjoy it. Also there was a convenient bus to get me back to Keswick.

This year I had a similar plan — look out for a nice weather window in July and go for it. I figured it would take me 16 hours and, not wanting to swim any of the lakes in the dark, I opted to start at 5 am, hopefully finishing well before sunset. Although I wanted to be self-sufficient, I figured a bit of company would help to keep me going, so I asked if any Black Combers would like to join me and got a very positive response — especially with less than a week's notice.

Nick Sebley joined me for leg one, providing some suitably low-key early morning company. Keswick was still asleep as we set off from the Moot Hall. We had some amazing views back over Derwentwater as we headed up Skiddaw. Having done this leg twice before my timings were spot on, with 90 minutes to get up and a further 45 minutes to get us down to the lake. It had been cold on Skiddaw, and the idea of a swim did not appeal, but once we were down at the lake with the sun shining on the water, a swim was quite inviting. I got all my swimming kit on (relieved that I had remembered it all), checked my bearing and set off across the lake.

The water was cool and the lake surface calm. I headed towards a distinctive white building on the far side of the lake, sighting every few strokes to make sure I was going in the right direction. Lake swimming is unnerving — you look down into a murky abyss, unable to distinguish anything clearly. You can't make out the bottom of the lake and there are none of those reassuring



straight black lines you take for granted in a swimming pool. More concerning is that distance is impossible to gauge, as there are no reference points on the water's surface. You can think you've been swimming for ages but when you look back you're not far from the shore and no matter how big the lake is, it never feels like you are anywhere but the middle until you are less than 50 metres from the shore. The house I was heading for disappeared into the trees, so I changed tack and headed for a person on the lakeshore, thinking it was someone waiting to join me on leg two. It wasn't, and by the time I got out of the water, they had disappeared. I changed into my running gear ready for leg two.

I found Matthew Allen and Emma waiting for me as I emerged onto the main road. Matthew was going to join me for leg two, Emma was shuttling people around until joining me on leg four. We headed along a cycle path and then a road until we reached Beckstones Gill where I had to wash my wetsuit and other swim kit to ensure I didn't transfer any invasive species into the cleaner waters of Crummock and Buttermere (every Frog Graham participant must submit a biosecurity plan in advance of their attempt). Barf gave us great views back across Bassenthwaite, Lord's Seat had great 360 degree views of the hills to come, and Ullister Hill is nothing to speak of. In Whinlatter forest we met the Gruffalo and crossed paths with the early parkrun finishers before heading up Grisedale Pike. The route from here has an amazing array of stunning views, but the clag was in so we focused on getting the nav right and ticking off the summits — Hopegill Head, Sand Hill, Eel Crag (aka Crag Hill, confusingly), Wandope and Whiteless Pike. As we dropped down off of Whiteless Pike, we were treated to the beautiful views across Crummock Water, which took my mind off my already aching knees. Emma met me at, Hawes Point telling me that the leg three crew (the party leg) were waiting for me on the other side of Crummock water, and sure enough I could hear some distant whooping across the water.

This swim was very nearly a disaster as in my eagerness to get in the water I had left my phone and map in the outside pockets of my tow float. Luckily, a final double check kept everything dry, and I set off across Crummock water. It's important to stop and look around you on each of the swims, as the middle of a lake surrounded

by fells provides uniquely stunning views that few people have the chance to enjoy. In Crummock Water and Buttermere, these views are particularly awesome.

I was met at Low Ling crag by the party people: Robbie, Eleanor, Ava and Nick, all very keen to help out in any way they could. Mellbreak is a tough part of the Frog — the hillside is very steep, there is no path, too much bracken and heather and not enough rock. I failed to find the route I had taken on the previous week's recce, but we managed to make our way to the top. By this point, the day was heating up and people were constantly offering me water, food, lotions, potions and pills. I kept my hands free for grabbing vegetation to aid my upwards momentum and succumbed to the group's mothering instinct at Scale Force where I hydrated, ate, applied suncream and promised to keep everyone informed on the output of my bladder. Matthew re-joined us, having popped into Buttermere for an ice-cream, and we all headed up Red Pike, over to High Stile and down a steep boulder-strewn path to Horse Close on Buttermere. I have read about people hallucinating during ultra-endurance events, but didn't believe it until I saw the parrot. One of those big colourful blue and gold macaws that fly through the jungles of Central America. Apparently, it belonged to a couple who had brought it out to Buttermere for the day.



Ava joined me for the swim across Buttermere — much braver than me, she swam without a wetsuit. It felt unsocial to be swimming front crawl, so we switched to breaststroke so we could chat and soak up the views along the way.

Emma joined me for the last leg. It starts with a very steep path up Robinson, where Pete, Hazel and Will were due to meet me for the run along to Catbells. I took a gel before we started the climb and relied on Emma's chat to distract me from the uphill. Eventually, we made it to the



summit of Robinson but there was no one about. And then the helicopter landed... "Were Pete, Hazel and Will arriving in style?" I wondered, or maybe it was Tom Cruise coming to congratulate me on my frogging effort so far. Alas, it was just the Mission Impossible stunt team, who said the briefest of hellos before jumping off Robinson and parasailing down to Gatesgarth Farm. We met Hazel on Dale Head; Pete and Will had tried to join us on Robinson but due to something to do with a racing line our paths hadn't crossed. Feeling the end was in sight, I trucked on, entertained by Emma and Hazel's company and their updates as to the location of Pete and Will. By Dale Head Tarn, Pete had caught us up, but aside from the occasional rumour, I didn't get to see Will on the fells. I'd been concerned about the more runnable parts of leg four — I knew I could plod uphill and gravity would get me down again, but would I still have any strength to keep me moving on the level? Yes, it turns out, I would. High Spy to Catbells over Maiden Moor was lovely; I felt good and was 30 minutes ahead of time as I got to the final swim at Derwentwater. Julian had very kindly offered to canoe next to me across the lake and was

waiting in Otterbiel Bay when I arrived.

The final swim across Derwentwater is the longest, and you have to traverse three islands along the way. I kept my fell shoes on for this swim. Otterbiel Island is home to a large number of angry gulls who dive bomb anyone who comes near. Feeling tired by this point, I switched to breaststroke, which created some unique pain in my tired knees. St. Herbert's Island is rather overgrown and was quiet apart from a couple of paddleboarders. Rampsholme Island had numerous groups of people wild camping and bivvying on it — I'm not sure what they made of the rather cold-looking man running across it in a wetsuit. By the time I got all the way across Derwentwater, my feet were numb and my hands were almost too cold to change back into my running gear.

Emma joined me for the final run into Keswick and back to the Moot Hall. I could hear my shoes hitting the tarmac but couldn't feel my feet at all. A few people were there to cheer me home (including Will), and as two Bob's were about to finish as well, I received a decent reception. As I sipped my victory beer, I checked my time: 15 hours 35 minutes. I had finished well inside the 16-hour target I was aiming for and had stayed 30 minutes ahead of my schedule for most of the second half of the round.

Massive thanks to everybody who joined me on the round. It was a great day out. If anyone wants to try the Frog in the future, I'd be happy to help out however I can. For those who think it's a bit too much there is also a Tadpole Round which would be a great way for a group of Black Combers to spend a hot summer's day...



OLD COUNTY TOPS



Date: 21st May 2022

Result: 2nd

by Josh Hartley

A brief summary of a mighty fine day out on the classic 37(ish)-mile-long legendary race taking in the 3 summits of the old counties of Lancashire, Cumberland and Westmorland (you can work out the highest summit in each yourself). Well it's called a race, and it is, but if you approach it like a race you might find yourself in a bit of pickle come Scafell... with a very long way to go.

Sparing the detail, there was some very sad news for Harry prior to the race. There is no way to escape being hurt or saddened by events beyond our control; it will always be painful and we don't get to choose what happens, but we do get to choose how we respond. The choice for Harry was "Why me?" or "What can I do about it?" Harry responded with the latter and I have enormous respect for how he looked to the possibilities that lay ahead.

As this was a paired race, we had to work together. Harry and I are superbly evenly matched: we finish within minutes if not seconds of each other in races, and we knew we would match each other. We know each other well — when to push on or hold off, and, of course, Harry had to trust that I was the more reliable navigator. But even more importantly than that, Harry had to trust my plan: "Go slow, let them go, enjoy the ride and see how we are when we get to Cockley Beck."

I've seen the queue at Roy's Ices on a sunny Sunday move quicker than our start to the race. We just let everyone go — folks we knew we could easily leave in our wake in a 'normal' shorter race whipped past us, disappearing into the caterpillar train over to Grasmere. Going over the top and running through to Grisedale Tarn, we slightly sped up from a shuffle to a trot, alongside a few Ambleside gents, akin to racing snails. On reaching Grisedale Tarn, we could just make out the leading pair of Lightfoot and Tom Owens, only two faint white jerseys at this range, cresting the ridge onto Dollywagon. "Heck, look at them!" I said to Harry, forgetting for the umpteenth time that Harry is as blind as a bat.

We summited Helvellyn, having picked off a few more pairs, in 1 hour 45, compared to the leaders' 1 hour 34. The descent down to Thirlmere is a rough old treat; the knowledge there were jam sarnies and flapjacks to come inspired some relaxed but effective descending past a couple more pairs ready for a re-fuel. As we left the feed station and headed to Scafell, it went eerily quiet. We didn't see anyone for ages, which was slightly disconcerting, until we hit "The Bog", which is aptly named. We trudged through to find, with noted sense of relief, a wandering Josh Jardine and Tom Simpson, clearly struggling and dropping Haribos all over the place.

The rain came in as we reached Angle tarn... coats on. Oh yes, I might mention the kit check at registration — you need a hat (a buff doesn't cut it) and a waterproof needs taped seams! Fortunately for both of us, Harry brought two hats with him and I brought a spare waterproof with taped seams — teamwork! While we're at it, Mike Vogler — you still have my spare emergency blanket.

After a few more wet and cold slow-motion overtakes in the clag and an amusing craic with a bunch of wandering Scouse lads seeking out the highest summit in England, we reached the summit of Scafell. The marshal said, "Well done lads — you're in 2nd, maybe 10 minutes back from Ricky." Our initial reaction started with F and ended with Off. We could not believe it (in truth it was a 13 minute gap — got to love marshal optimism). As we headed down rough crag, dreaming of what could be (well I was; I think Harry was just trying not to stack it), we believed the plan was working. We soon came crashing back down to earth with a bang (not literally thank goodness): we found ourselves a little too far over left in the crags having to zig zag here and there, lowering each other carefully down... lots of nervous comments, losing time hand over fist. We remained calm, eventually escaping the crags and crossing to the grassy gully dropping steeply into Great Moss. We expected to see teams back ahead of us...

There were none.

After much further trotting, we reached Cockley Beck, again to a "You're 10 minutes behind the leaders". Ok — so we didn't do so bad after all (we were now 11 minutes back it transpires — we gained 2 minutes). Time to push on. As we scampered up the flank of Grey Friar we (by that I mean 'I' — Harry is blind don't forget) saw two white dots not all that far ahead, maybe 7 or 8 minutes ahead. Now we started to believe, we pushed, but I hit the rev limiter, and for the first time in the day Harry took to the front and essentially dragged me to Coniston Old Man (I think I had under-eaten in the Scafell area). We passed Ricky and Tom coming back from the Old Man somewhere on Brim Fell; it was more like a 5-7 minute gap by this point, but we were sure that having been shocked to see us, Tom and Ricky would up the pace and leave us for dust.

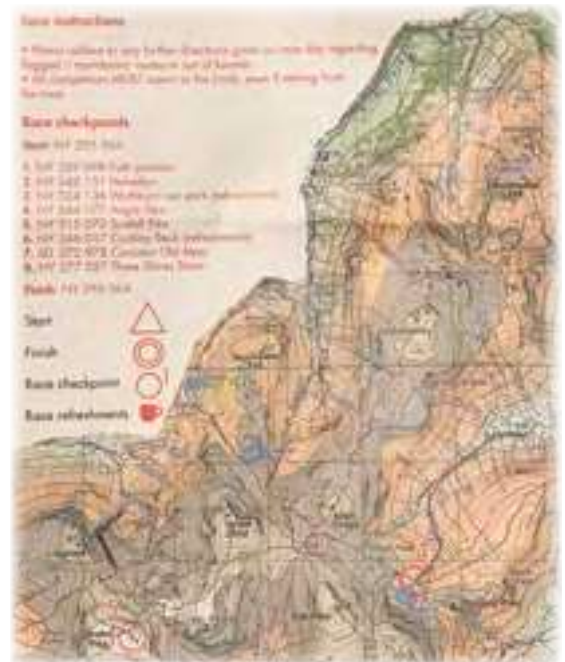
Harry continued to crack the whip and we cascaded down Wrynose pass, no one in sight behind; we were going to do alright here. The path round Blea Tarn was deeply painful. I looked back one last



time as we crossed over Wall End. We were so worried about who might be gaining on us, we (I) failed to look forward. I might have seen that two white shirts, Ricky and Tom, had suffered even more than us in the latter stages, finishing only 2 mins ahead in 7:05:17. Honestly, I will never forget the feeling as we crossed that line to finish 2nd, proud as anything of Harry on that day.

We'd just sat down in the food tent next to Ricky and Tom with an egg sarnie, when Ricky with surprise in his voice remarked, "So, who are you guys?"

A joyous day, dedicated to George.



THE SAUNDERS LAKELAND MOUNTAIN MARATHON

by Beth Ripper



I'd heard really good things about the Saunders a few years ago and it's been high on my to do list since... it's a two-day mountain running and navigating race held at a different location in the Lakes each year. There are various courses you can enter, depending upon your level of experience and ambitiousness! When Emma came rallying the troops earlier this year I thought it would be fun to give it a go! Eleanor would be by running buddy, and Emma had teamed up with Helen. We'd decided to enter the Harter class (Emma quote: the most fun you can have with no mountain marathon experience!). Great idea at the time, but I was a bit apprehensive when it got closer to the day... I'd done naff all running and life was totally mental so I was completely disorganised. It got to the weekend before and I felt I should at least read the latest email and make sure I had everything on the kitlist! Thankfully, Eleanor was in the same boat, having just got back from an epic Tour de Mont Blanc trip. Amazingly, we made it to the start field in Boot with all the right gear and time to spare...! :)

The start of the race is quite exciting — you line up, step forward, then go! Quick — grab your maps, rip off a list of the check points and start annotating. We crouched in the field and marked up our maps before heading out of the start field and up the first climb. It was absolutely roasting and we were both pushing to the first check point. I silently hoped I'd be able to keep up with Eleanor over the weekend — I thought I could probably manage day 1, but wasn't sure if I'd have the stamina to keep up on day 2! Thankfully the start of the race was on familiar territory and I'm good on rough ground — the tussocks and trods around Eskdale Moor were no bother. We were flying along; we cruised into checkpoint 2... but then we struggled to find checkpoint 3. We wasted a heap of time here as we couldn't work out whether we'd overshot the checkpoint or not reached it yet. Neither of us could make a decision about whether to keep on climbing or head back down the fell. Eventually we were caught by Helen and Emma, who nudged us in the right direction before they powered off into the distance. I felt a bit deflated, but thankfully more comfortable with the scale of the map and happy to know we were on the right track again. We crossed Great Moss, waded through the Esk and started up the long climb to Esk Pike. I got a bit worried here. Eleanor is a much stronger, faster runner than me usually, but she was struggling on this climb, like she'd had all the energy sucked out of her legs. She wasn't recovered from the nasty virus she'd had the week before, so we took it steady, enjoyed the views and chatted. We were both there to enjoy the weekend, not beast ourselves. As we climbed higher, the clag came down. The visibility dropped and we knew we'd have to nav a bit more carefully to the next checkpoint. Soon, we came across Helen and Emma who were with a cluster of other runners looking for the same checkpoint as us. We knew we hadn't done enough climb yet, so Eleanor and I pushed on and found the next checkpoint. Although the vis was poor, I knew the way to the next checkpoint and we were soon on our own again in the mist. It was a good feeling to be out on the fells in those conditions, totally comfortable with where we were and moving well over the rocky ground. We dropped down to Esk Hause and made our way to the tarns by Allen Craggs. We went over Allen Craggs instead of around (I was told afterwards: 'It's the Borrowdale line!'... all very well, but I've never run Borrowdale!), but the route choice meant we had a clear view of the tarns and where to go to hit the checkpoint spot on.

From here we headed back towards Great End, but instead of summiting, the best line to the next checkpoint was down a steep, technical trail by Greta Gill, which drops you onto the Corridor Route. I'd never been that way before and loved the view from the descent. We cruised our way to Lingmell Col (munching crisps!) before flying down past

the hoards of tourists on the Scafell path. I was relieved to see the camp at Wasdale Head... it had been a good 15 miles of running on the first day, with a decent amount of climb and technical terrain. We dibbed at the Day 1 finish and were glad to take off our heavy packs. Helen and Emma weren't long behind us and we cheered them in.

After we set up the tent I emptied my bag and realised how much food I had left over. Tons. It was quite nice to indulge in a good eating binge with the excuse that I didn't have to carry it the next day! After a tasty tortellini tea (which I definitely didn't burn in the jetboil then drop all over the grass), I rejoiced in chocolate bounty dipped in Ambrosia custard — absolute heaven, om nom nom. It was good craic chatting with Eleanor, Helen and Emma over our post-run coke and beers. We also caught up with fellow BCRs Andy and Petra who were running the Fairfield score course. We wandered over to the finish marquee where lists of times and positions after Day 1 had been taped up. We couldn't believe it that we'd come in first female pair! Tacitly we knew we wanted to hold that position for the next day... and just like that our chilled out, cruisy jaunt became a race.

It wasn't very late before we all decided to head to bed — I was amazed that Eleanor was going to sleep on only two foam sitting mats! Turns out she slept like a log — she's definitely made for hardcore mountain marathoning!! I on the other hand, woke up looking and feeling like I'd been hit by a bus! After a hearty porridge breakfast (no I didn't burn that either...) I perked up and felt a bit more ready for the day. We packed up all our stuff; I thought my bag would feel much lighter after all my feasting but I couldn't tell the difference at all, and my shoulders just felt bruised from the straps. Our allocated start time was quite late in the morning, but it turned out you could leave whenever you were ready so the camping field was actually pretty empty by the time we left. We waved bye to Helen and Emma and started the climb up Ill Gill.

Much to my dismay, Eleanor had some good climb back in her legs, and I was breathing heavily by the time we got to checkpoint one. I was glad that the misty rain and thick clag came as we headed over Ill Gill, as I knew we'd do well. This really is my home turf and I could run it blindfolded — we ran confidently along the summit, to Whin Rigg and then the next checkpoint at Irton Fell. There were a couple of people here grilling their map and compass, but we flew straight past them and back towards Miterdale. The lower part of the descent was steep, rocky and slippery, shrouded in parts by high bracken, but we quickly made it down before heading straight on up the other side towards White Moss. I wondered if having so much local knowledge was cheating, as we barely needed the map and I knew every tussock to jump and bog to avoid... We weaved our way through the trods, pushing along and silently hoping we'd be able to hang on to our lead. We had one last bit of route choice before the finish — we didn't take the fastest line, but at least we made a quick decision this time so didn't make the same mistake as the day before. It wasn't long before we were on the final downhill. Eleanor found another gear (I don't know where from — I was knackered!) and I hung on to her as best I could as she led a blinding sprint to the finish. We dibbed, exchanged grins and headed for the event marquee. We had no idea if we would retain our lead as people had all started at different times, but we'd had a really good run and pushed each other well, so felt good. We found Helen and Emma who'd had a really good day too and sat together, scoffing the chilli and cheese finishers meal — just what we needed. Soon they were announcing results — we were super happy to find we'd finished first female team in the Harter Class, 18th overall after having been in 31st position after Day 1. With more than 90 teams taking part, it was fair to say we were a bit chuffed! :)

It was super fun running with Eleanor, and I'd definitely be keen to have another go at a mountain marathon in future. It would be interesting to see how we'd fare in a different part of the Lakes (definitely some work needed on our nav skills!)... and I'm not sure I'm up for October camping at the OMM yet... but maybe SLMM Carrock course next year...?! :)



An interview with a little Ripper

by Beth Ripper

I have some of my most profound and fragrant conversations with Charlotte whilst she's on the loo. She's not one for rushing a good thing, so I've become used to 'loo-loitering' where my time is mostly spent talking about the totally random and fabulous things that pass through a four year old's mind. I took one loo-loitering opportunity to quiz Charlotte on all things fell running... Here's what she said!

Who is the best runner in BCR?

Josh. He went so fast. Harry's the best next runner.

Who is the best girl runner in BCR?

Becca! She's always excited! Daddy is the smiliest boy runner.

What is the best fell to go running on?

Birker fell. Or Yoghurt fell.

What clothes do you wear for fell running?

Warm clothes in winter. Shorts and t-shirts in summer. Boots for winter. Running shoes for summer.

Who is good at running for a long time?

Sabrina. She ran a big long race. She ran for nearly 65 days.

What's the best food to eat when you're running?

Cake.

Where's the best place to start your run?

In a big grassy field.

How many mountains should you climb when you run?

One, maybe two. Three if you're feeling really good.

What should you say to yourself if you're feeling tired on a run?

Stop being tired body! Stop being noisy legs! (And then you bang them and pat them).

What's the best way to find your way on the fells?

Compass and map!

After a fell race, where is the best place to go?

First you need to get dressed. And then you go to a cafe.

What advice would you give somebody who is just starting running?

Don't be scared! It's exciting. :)

Which is best — uphill or downhill?

Downhill! Because I can go fast!

What can make you run faster?

Running shoes. Popcorn! Clothes people can see you in.

What is the best colour of fell running shoes to wear?

Orange. Orange is a funny colour.

Which dog is better at fell running — Pip or Mae?

Pip.

When did you start fell running?

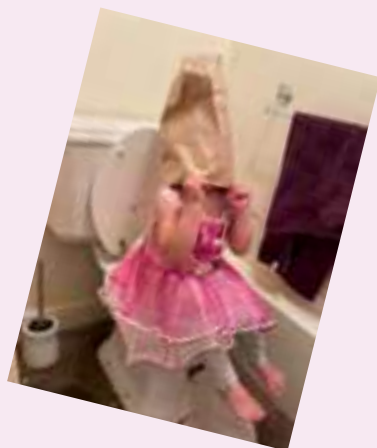
When I was six months old.

How long do you think you'll keep fell running for?

20 years. Then I'll do some cycling.

You all done...?

Yep.



The Yorkshire Three Peaks

by Harry Stainton



Most regular people would say the 3 Peaks is not a proper fell race as it is “too runnable”. However, in my opinion, you better listen to a man who knows what he’s saying as it is hard and heavy!

It’s a race I have wanted to do for years because it is suits me, being long, quick underfoot, and easy to not go wrong navigation-wise, so I finally got round to having a go this year and it was metal as hell!



Before the race, I reced it with the rest of Yorkshire on Easter Saturday and, despite having a major bonk due to not taking any sustenance, it lived up to my expectations, leaving me with a new level of confidence and power. Also, this year’s event was doubling up as a selection race for the European Mountain Running Team so would have a field that was forever stronger than all.

On race day, the weather was like snakes in Southern flames and the atmosphere at race HQ was goddamn electric. Hundreds were in attendance taking over this town (**Horton in Ribblesdale**) and we set off with a mind set on annihilation after the race organizer announced there would be a £100 prize for the 1st up Pen-y-ghent. I decided to set off conservatively,

grinding my axe for a long time with a view to hunting competitors down on the 23-mile route.

After Pen-y-ghent, the route is just rolling moor on compacted trails – ideal for me being a roadie – and I overtook lots of runners on the way to Ribbleshead Viaduct. This is when I started to feel morose and old but was uplifted with angel’s words after getting a mention from Denise Park (physiotherapist) on the speaker phone and began the trudge up Whernside. This is when handsome Phil from Helm Hill overtook me as he usually does in long races, eventually putting 5 minutes into me by the end of the race. Dropping off Whernside left the immovable stone in my world of weak that is Ingleborough. With hard lines and sunken cheeks, I managed to get into a good rhythm going up the climb and, after reaching the summit, i.e. 3rd peak, began the never-ending descent to the finish.

What should be an easy last few miles is terribly hard going, especially when you are broken, but with a black tooth grin I still passed a boy who was walking on home after overcooking it hostile. By demons be driven, and with bones in traction, I felt the strength of many to crush who might stop me and managed to finish 13 steps to nowhere. I was truly shattered and slaughtered at the end but left far beyond driven, wanting to return next year, so kiss my ass, Dracula.



RUNNING REFLECTIONS

by Helen Walker

After the worst few months of my life, running has become my saviour, as have my fellow running family; without running and the amazing playground we live in, my life I feel would not be the same. I have overcome many challenges, emotions and obstacles by running: I've learnt to be independent, more positive, eat better and appreciate the outdoors even more; I've improved my navigation skills; and I've discovered how many amazing friends I have!

I got up the courage to race and actually surprised myself by doing rather well! First was Black Combe Dash — I loved every minute of this, especially the uphill! The week before, we did the route in the worst weather and visibility possible — it was grim! But I felt good all the way round and, to my surprise, I was 3rd lady and 1st V40. Wow!

Next was Dalton 10k. Yes, I know it's a road race, but it has some hills. I just turned up and ran like I was on a social run, finishing with a huge PB as 4th lady and 1st V40. Whooop!

Next on my list was Caw. I love this race and felt confident, which is something I don't say a lot! I listened to Pete and Hazel's advice and, to my surprise, I picked a good route and secured another PB! Then I went on to do the Short Duddon for the second time, and I loved every minute of it. To my surprise, my navigation was pretty much spot on — Pete kindly shouted me back on the climb up to Caw. Thanks Pete! And to my amazement, I got 2nd lady and first V40; I just could not believe it — really proud of myself.

All these moments have given me a boost and have been a welcome distraction, not to mention how much fun all the social runs are. These I look forward to every week! Anyway, next was another road race: the Hawkshead 10k. This was an absolute scorching evening and I literally thought I was going to burst into flames, but I got another PB. All these runs and races had been leading up to my challenge: the Saunders Mountain Marathon, something I'd never heard of before Emma asked if I fancied it and I said absolutely. So I brushed up on my navigation skills, was running 40-mile weeks, raided Pete and Hazel's kit, and did some tent practice and some bag practice (as I've not carried all my kit since doing DofE at school many moons ago!). On the night before, I was super excited. Emma and I checked out



our kit, taking out non-essentials and hoping our bags would not be too heavy, but they still were! We arrived at base camp — I was so excited and we met our fellow teammates and wished them well.

We got to the start line all prepared and then we were off: we collected our map and plotted our route and wow — I was amazed I could do this, but Emma's a pro so didn't need to worry! We set off running/walking while navigating and made our way through all the bog. We worked great together and soon found our first checkpoint and most of the others without difficulty. We had one error but that did not spoil our fun. As we descended towards camp, we were thankful we had ordered a can of coke each — we could not wait to drink it! And boy did it hit the spot! We had a lovely evening with Beth and Eleanor chatting and refuelling. I scoffed down 12 Bourbon biscuits! Next day we woke after an amazing night's sleep, packed up and set off in the torrential rain straight into a climb. And yes, I loved every minute of it yet again and felt confident with our route. Our nav was good and soon the sun came out! We finished with big smiles on our faces and I felt like I had achieved something for myself — I felt alive, something I thought I had lost! We finished as the 3rd ladies team — amazing! — and what was even more amazing was that our fellow teammates Beth and Eleanor were first. Huge congratulations!

So, my running year so far has kept me going when I have been to many dark places: it has taught me to survive and keep going as have you all. What an amazing club you all are — I want to take this moment to thank you all for your continued support, as without you all and running, I feel I would have been in a very different path or place in my life! So my best advice for anyone feeling down, having a bad day or having a hard time, is to get out in the fells and run. It's the best medicine I know.



Rachel's Racing Report

written by
Rachel Read

Emma Seery asked if I would write an article about one of the races I have done lately. But we decided that it might be better to write about being a relatively new-ish member of BCR and the runs I have done over the past few months. I did not want to let Seery and Robbie down. It is rather long, so persevere... you may get a mention...

Browsing through boring Facebook, I came across something of interest. Black Combe Runners had invited me to their Winter League runs — how exciting. I think I will do these — Saturday mornings, excellent.

So I turned up for the **Winter League** Runs and, joy of joys, the slowest runners go first, even better. As all the runs were fairly local to where I live (Bootle), I could do Millom Park Run first. Jon Bailey and I would do the Park Run first, then a quick change of trainers and off to the handicap runs. Dunnerdale on New Year's Day. Giant's Grave on 8 January, Appletreeworth on 15 January. I tried to work out whether doing the Park Run first (three miles), then doing the BCR run

was a good move: did it provide a good warm-up or was it a waste of energy and would slow me down? Bailey was always very keen to do both, and his enthusiasm wore off on me. John Shevs — also from Bootle — would also do Park Run first. We were doing a run at Devoke Water on 29 January, and I asked Hazel Taylor if I could run with her as I did not know the route. Hazel is too nice to say no and we set off together. It was quite apparent I was holding her back as she politely waited for me at the top after her third cup of tea. "You go ahead and I'll keep you in my sights," I puffed. By that time, some of the back runners were catching me up! I realised then never to ask someone to run with you unless they are exactly the same speed, and I have never found anyone slow enough!

After the Winter League had finished I wanted to try other fell races, and Bailey was brilliant at coming up with races we could do and share the driving. I was working with a girl in the office called Rebecca Cleator, who was a keen (and fast) cyclist. I mentioned fell running to her and she tried a couple out. Cleator was like a duck to water and was naturally fast and fearless. She was also very keen to enter races.



I was invited to do **Blake Fell** by a CFR (Cumberland Fell Runners) friend on Saturday 22 January. It was a pretty grim, misty, drizzly day but a good turn-out of BCR runners. I always get mildly hysterical when there are enough BCR gents to make a team and borderline hysterical when there are enough BCR ladies to make a team. Today was one of those days. Runners were zig-zagging everywhere in the mist. I could just make out Cleator hurtling down a hill towards me — "Well done Cleator!" I shout. "Well done Read!" Cleator shouts. Pleasantries exchanged, back to the race. One thing to mention on this race is the camber of the hill after half way running on a sheep trod. I was desperately trying to keep the runner ahead of me in sight — just a blur in the mist — but the camber made it feel like running with one leg longer than the other! BCR did well that day.

We all have favourite runs and not-so-favourite runs for different reasons. **Muncaster Luck** is one of my favourites — I have only done it once. The only BCR ladies were me and Ava so sadly no team. I was bumbling along nicely when I came to the first river crossing. It was great to see Beth Ripper cheering people across the river. After the river came the climb, and this is where Lindsay Buck caught me up. I know Lindsay and Jim from my old Club, Blengdale, but now I like to affectionately call her 'Wasdale Womble'. I knew she would know the route, so I stuck to her like glue. It was a



Photo credit: Stephen Wilson www.granddayoutphotography.co.uk



windy, wet day and I felt for the marshals. Once past the Pepperpot near Muncaster I cheered up — homeward bound. But then another river crossing before the final climb to the Castle. Wasdale Womble stopped to clean the mud off her trainers, but I persuaded her to run the last bit so we would be under three hours! Bailey, Ava and Mr Sebley had finished hours ago and were waiting for us. Definitely one I recommend. Bailey has the patience of a saint and he knows he has to wait for me to huff and puff home. It is just a question of how long he needs to wait — 30 minutes, an hour or he needs to pitch his tent.

Another favourite is the Short Duddon. A glorious hot day this year and a good turnout of BCR runners. Most of them surprisingly doing the Long Duddon (hats off to them). But brilliant news, three BCR ladies to make a team in the Short Duddon (Helen, Hazel and I). Unfortunately no teams were mentioned in the results. It was great to see Petra handing out jelly beans on the course. A chap who was running the Long caught me up at the base of Caw. I shouted well done to him and he amazed me by saying, “We are running at the same pace.” “Yes, but you’ve run 15 miles more than me” was my response. I tried to catch up to Wasdale Womble, who had stopped for a social chat with some walkers, but she ran off and I could not catch her. As I was bumbling down to the stile near the end, a voice called out from behind — it was Harry, asking if he

could get past. He obviously did not want to get stuck behind an old lady making heavy work of climbing over a stile. I stepped aside and he whizzed past, getting a superb time.

Coledale Horseshoe — now, this is a race not to be taken on lightly. A scorcher of a day, parking was not great, especially in the van, so a good 20-minute walk to the start line. A good turn-out of BCR gents, but only two BCR ladies (Eleanor and I). Mr Sebley had tipped me off that there would be cakes at the end. I told my partner David and son Henry that I would be about three hours. It was one hell of a climb. My schoolboy error here was not taking any water (thinking travelling light would make me run faster). Coledale is full of walkers and a good majority of them said well done to me. I don’t think they expect to see many old women “running”, even though fell running seems to me to be an older person’s sport. By the time I got back to the starting field, the prize-giving was taking place. I sat on a rocky hill with my son Henry, pleased to make it back in one piece. It was not until we had walked back to the van that I realised I had forgotten to get a piece of cake. Eleanor got a very fast time, as did the BCR gents.

Hutton Roof — certainly a favourite, as this race is much flatter than I could have hoped for. I am not good at running uphill or downhill, so on the flat is the only time I can overtake people. Josh Hartley won a prize. Three BCR ladies (Hazel, Cleator and I), so we will feature on the results somewhere, and lots of gents to probably make two teams.

I did not enter the **Eskdale Elevation** this year as it looked far too scary. Mr Sebley kindly pointed out that I would probably be running on my own for most of the race and need good navigation skills, especially coming off Scafell in the mist. Mr Sebley’s sound advice made me think twice, and I was very grateful for him being so frank and honest. I felt like I was contemplating running across the Sahara equipped with two strawberry ice-lollies and a paperclip. Just because I had got a Montane top from T K Maxx does not mean I can enter and run the Montane Spine. Bailey and I did a recce of the Eskdale Elevation, joined by my friend Jen from CFR. It was pretty horrendous, as the snow on Scafell Summit made it difficult to find any paths off in the right direction. We ended up coming down a rock avalanche, which I did not enjoy. That sealed the deal of not entering it. Hats off to the ones who ran it. I will do this one in 2023. Besides, I had an ultra the weekend after — the **Manchester to Liverpool** 50 miler by GB Ultras. I will give you a little insight into ultra-running. Most ultra-runners have legs and arms covered in tattoos. We went to Manchester on the Friday to collect my number, and I looked at all the GB Ultras merchandise for sale. It was all rather pricey and I thought, “I am not parting with my cold, hard cash.” Five minutes later, I was the proud owner of a GB Ultras cap, a GB Ultras Vest, a GB Ultras buff and a collapsible cup (which was actually part of the kit). I would have bought a GB Ultras headtorch if they had such a thing, but will make do with my over-priced Petzl and my under-priced Aldi. On the day of the GB Ultra, I was bumbling along enjoying the run when a gentleman from Liverpool started chatting to me. He was running in the opposite direction to everyone else, looking for his



teammates. I saw him several times, and he told me about two hours into the run that two of his teammates had got a DNF. What do you mean? The run is not over yet. But they had got timed out at the first checkpoint (six miles). The run is very flat with a 14-hour cut-off. Later on, I got level with a very glamorous lady runner after we had run over a small bridge. She proudly said she had promised not to run any of the hills! I could not understand what she meant as we were running next to a canal. She must have meant the hump-back bridge. The checkpoints and food stations are pretty impressive with a good selection of foods. I did not hang about at the stations and just kept going. My GPS tracker gave up at the last checkpoint, so David tracking probably thought I had stopped. But I had made a friend on the route. She had planned to drop out at 38 miles due to a pin in her hip hurting. But she persevered and we finished together happily within the cut-off time. Ultra running is not for everyone, but I will probably have a ponder on doing the Glasgow to Edinburgh in a few years.

My big event was the **Mont Blanc Marathon** on 26 June with Jen Fraser from CFR. I was more concerned that EasyJet would cancel the flight from Manchester. I was flattered when Jen asked me to do this with her. It is quite a faff though — I had to get a doctor's certificate to show I was fit enough, and there were loads of emails (some in French). We looked around the Expo the day

before at the huge array of running equipment and energy food, gels and drinks. It was all a bit pricey and I was not parting with my cold, hard cash. Five minutes later, I was the proud owner of a Mont Blanc Marathon cap but 25 euros poorer.

I struggled with the heat and altitude on the day, and Jen was so strong I could not keep up with her on the climbs, so we separated. I heard some British guys complaining that the route was not runnable and part of the Golden Trail series. I have never seen so many young men leaning on their walking poles looking close to tears. You do not see that on a BCR race. The checkpoint times were much stricter than I thought, but we got round. The atmosphere for this is brilliant and worth the worry of getting there. I would recommend it purely for the views. Unfortunately, our flight the next day was delayed, so we had to run through Manchester airport to make it to the train. This is where hand luggage only comes in handy.

Okay, I will hurry along now as your time is precious, so, meanwhile back in Cumbria, another horseshoe — the **Fairfield Horseshoe** on Sunday 15 May. Only a week after Cleator, Bailey and I ran the **Keswick to Barrow**, so my legs would still be tired.

So I have done three horseshoes and I only need one more to get a complete set for my horse. This is not one of my favourite races. I was enjoying the first half but it seems to go awry after that. I saw some marshals at the top and they said, "Stick to the wall until you see the next marshals." I stuck to the wall like Gorilla Glue but did not see any more marshals for 32 miles, ok probably seven miles. As I was going downhill, I suddenly got into a trip and my arms were all over the place like a windmill trying to stay upright. Alas no — I fell forwards onto the gravel path; my right thumb took the brunt of the fall on the sharp gravel, followed by the thud of my chin on grass. The blood spurting from my thumb was pretty impressive. Slightly shaken, I jumped up and carried on; the blood was getting thicker and darker. It looked like I was running from a crime scene, but at two-miles-an-hour. By the time I reached the marshals at the bottom, there were gasps of horror. I had to run the last half mile against finishers heading back to the car park. My fingers had stuck together with congealed dark blood. I arrived back and showed Bailey and Cleator my war wound. After watching the prize-giving, I went to find the first-aid man, but he had gone. After washing off the blood, the actual wound was not too bad, and a nice chap patched it up. It turned out several BCR runners had injuries — Cleator banged her knees, Gavin his knees and Mr Sebley his wrist. At least Josh Hartley got a prize for being in the top ten males.

The **Kentmere Horseshoe** was a recent run on Sunday 17 July. This race is put on by the Pete Bland family. His son did the introduction and you could hear his voice breaking with emotion. I was right at the back waiting to go. I got chatting to a chap next to me who was going to claim last place — it was Pete Bland's brother, so he was thankful for all the runners who had come to support the race. A very nice run and definitely up there with my favourites. Please bear in mind the start line was a good 30 minutes' walk from the car park.

Whilst looking at the BCR page last year, I came across a little chart with my name on it. It was the Bob Grieve Trophy list of competitors. You need to do four races: Dunnerdale, Black Combe, Caw and **Kirkby Moor**. I was quite excited by this, as I only needed to do Kirkby Moor to complete the four. Time was running out to do a recce though. My saviour came in the name of Hazel, who was organising a recce on a Wednesday morning with Seery and Helen Walker. That meant taking the morning off work. I drove to Barrow to drop Henry off at school and then back to Kirkby to do the recce, then back to Barrow for lunchtime. Brilliant, now I knew the route. Kirkby Gala is a favourite. But the schoolboy error on the day: my laces came undone. Probably pulled undone by the spikey heather. My hands were too shaky to tie them tightly again. Dan Hartley was marshalling and gave me a great cheer. I pointed at my laces, feebly trying to tie them for the third time! "Get yourself home," Dan said. Those three words spurred me on and I was grateful for his support. Afterwards though I considered, "Did he mean get yourself home to Bootle or to the finish line?" My good friend Lesley Grieve was at the finish line with her two sons Christopher and Jonathan with their partners. It was an emotional day for them to see the Bob Grieve trophy being awarded to the winner. It was my honour to be a BCR runner taking part.

Right, enough waffling on — I do not think Robbie wanted such a long article, but I will finish by saying which my toughest race was. I was going to say the Mont Blanc Marathon. But now I am not so sure. Step aside Mont Blanc... there is a new kid on the block. Step forward the **Montane Lakeland 50**. This is the most recent race I've done (on Saturday 30 July finishing on Sunday 31 July). 50 miles through the wind and rain in the dark. I still have the blisters to prove it after running and walking with Cleator. I believe Paul Managh completed the Lakeland 100. Congratulations to him.

The next event will be my favourite Black Combe race on 29 August and then the **Three Shires** in September. **The FRA Relays** in October will be a superb outing for all BCRs taking part and supporting.

Take care on the fells everyone and thank you again for the privilege of being a Black Combe Runner.





An interview with *Nick Sebley*

On a Sunday evening after the Coniston Country Fair race, Eleanor and I headed over to Nick's to interview him for the newsie. After being almost literally bowled over by Jono's enthusiastic greeting, we were invited in for a drink and a chat while Nick put some pizzas in the oven. It was at this point that we learnt that it's not only in fell races that Nick's one step ahead of the game: we were presented with a three-page hand-written 'cheat sheet' full of facts about Nick's life to save us the bother of asking too many questions. Here is all the info he provided us with, copied out in full:

Born: Perivale, West London

Nickname: Seb or Sebbers

Favourite colour: yellow

Favourite foods: roll mop herrings / STP

Drink: Sancerre

Breakfast: Jordans Super Berry Granola
and a banana

Football team: Chelsea

First car: Renault 10

Current car: Blue 4x4 (MLC)

First concert: The Jam @ Hammersmith Odeon

First job: PAPER ROAD, Eastcote, Middx

First race: Inter school X-country

First fell race: Dunnerdale

Favourite fell event: FRA relays

Best marathon time: 3:11 (London)

Favourite book: 'Into the Silence'
(Wade Davis)

Favourite author: Ian Rankin (Rebus Series)

Currently listening to: 'Raise the Roof' (Robert
Plant & Alison Krauss)

Confession: I'm a 'petrol head' and bought my
first piston at the age of 16.

Children: Daughter and 2 stepsons involved in
pizzas, IT and motor racing

Pets: Jono & Darcy (now living up at Penrith)

Best BCR moment: watching the competitors at
the start of Dunnerdale in
2021, my first year as race
organiser.

Worst BCR moment: getting lost for the second
year in the Winter League
at Beacon Tarn in the clag

Other: Moved to Cumbria from
Buckinghamshire in 2006, after falling in
love with Eskdale and the Duddon Valley

Current occupation: painter decorator

Previous occupation: distribution of wholesale
motor spares

Shoes: Mudclaw 3000 or Salomon Speed Cross

Kit: happy with bum bag or vest

Tips: beetroot, salt stick electrolyte fast chews,
fresh pasta with tuna the day before a race!

There you have it, ladies and gentlemen — everything you need to know about Nick Sebley. However, despite Nick's efforts to render the interview null and void, Eleanor and I felt we ought to put a little effort in and ask some questions of our own. Here's what we found out.

How did you get into Black Combe?

Val Gill got me into it actually. I was up there running and she said, "Come and join Black Combe." Before I moved up, I did a bit of fell running on holiday. We used to go over to Eskdale, Wha House Farm. There's a B&B, top end of the valley. Right opposite where we park.

What made you decide to make the move full time up to Cumbria?

Quality of life. Getting out of the rat race. That's probably the main thing. Love of the countryside. I gradually moved further and further away from Central London.



Have you got any goals or challenges you're working towards?

Only the Vet 60 stuff really. Trying to improve. The next stage up is quite a big jump really, to get up to anywhere near Mark Roberts or people like that. It's 5 or 10 minutes a race — that's a lot of time to find.

What kind of race suits you best?

More sort of cross country really, the flatter stuff, because that's historically what I've done from school. Something like Kirkby Moor. I just go into autopilot then. When you're on the fell more, a lot of it's quite technical. I'm very cautious going down. Unless I'm in a right mood. If I can see someone I want to catch and I've really got my race head on, then I won't worry about it; I'll just do it. But a lot of the time, I'll just take it easy. I don't want to end up not running for four or five months.



What is the secret to your success as a Vet 60?

Has there been any? A few local races maybe. I'm not really running any more than I used to. I'm probably running on a more regular basis, two or three times a week. That includes racing. I never do any more than three. And one of those might be a cycle. Definitely helps with the climbing, if I go up to Wrynose Pass. It helps descending as well because obviously your legs aren't quite so tired. I'm a regular on Tuesdays as well, although that's usually an easy run.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to get into fell racing?

Join a club to start with. That's the first thing. And then respect the mountains, make sure you're taking the right gear with you. Join the FRA as well really. Some of these races only have FRA members now, which is a good idea, because it means everybody in theory should know what to take, and that helps the race organiser as well.

What's your favourite social run location?

Oooh. I'd say Black Combe to be honest. It's quite easy. Well, it's not easy, but it's always easy underfoot. You can get a good run in; it's quite fast. There's a lovely photo when we were up there before the Black Combe Dash last year, and we had about thirty people or more because people came from CFR. There were some beautiful photos. It's the sea as well. The fact that when you get up to the top you've got the sea there. You can see the Isle of Man, and it's just a bit different from the rest of them I guess.



If you could only do one more race before you die, what would it be?

I haven't done Ennerdale. I'd like to give that a go. Although I was sort of happy this year that it was cancelled! I think it's the fact that if you have trouble or something you've still got to get back to the start.

What's been your favourite race this year?

In the last twelve months, Langdale. I look forward to doing that again. That's a cracking race. It's got everything there: it's got some real technical stuff, some horrible stuff. We were up in the clag and it was brilliant. I cut my knee going in the bog. You go up Esk Pike, over horrible rocks, then you clamber up Bowfell and you've got the Crinkles, which you need to get round the back of. You get to the top of the Crinkles and decide whether you're going to do the bad step, which I did and made up loads of ground. I must have made five minutes because the others had gone back on themselves. Then you've got to get up Pike of Blisco and get the right way coming down there.



What about race organising? Was it your first time organising a race at Dunnerdale?

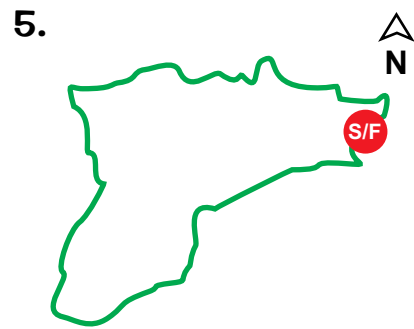
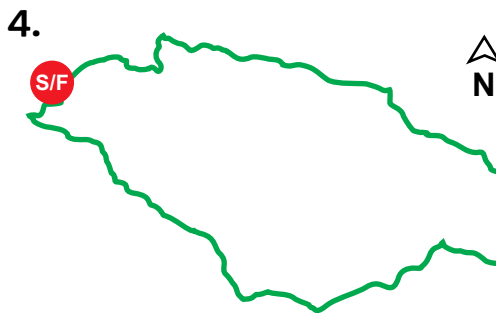
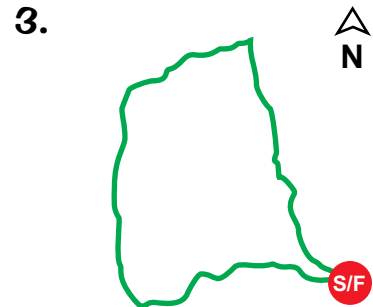
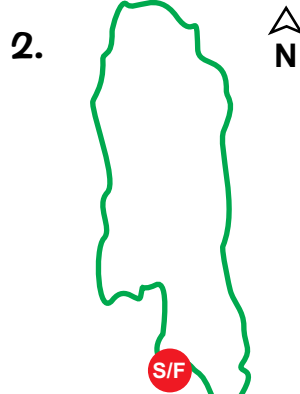
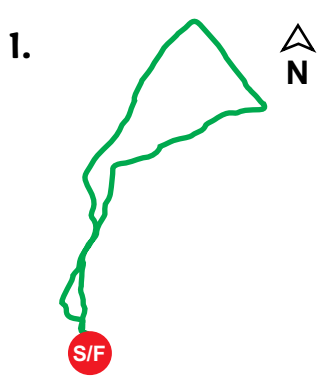
Yes, apart from our little club ones. I had three days off before to make sure everything was ok. I was down there talking to some of the farmers about different bits and bobs, but it was really just about forward planning. You've got to be fairly regimental about it. It definitely needed some time off and perhaps a day off afterwards to tidy up and make sure everything's where it was or should be.

What's your favourite thing about BCR?

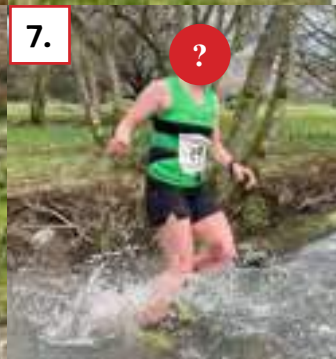
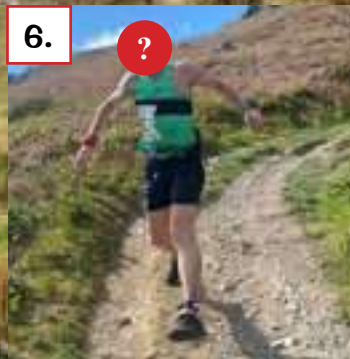
Friendship. I think it's just a great club. Everyone looks after each other.

QUIZ CORNER

Can you identify these well-known fell races from only an outline of the route? All data has come from Josh's Strava, so take it up with him if you think there are any dodgy lines! Answers on the next page.



'Race Faces' returns! Can you identify the BCRs from the race photos below with their faces obscured? Answers on the next page.



The Cumbrian Traverse

by Eleanor Claringbold



The idea of a solo challenge had been playing around in my head for a while.

The Cumbrian Traverse came on my radar for several reasons: it's a point-to-point, it starts in Broughton Mills and it was the right kind of distance and ascent. With 32 miles (51.5 km) and 12,000 ft of elevation, I knew it was attainable, but would certainly be a challenge. I didn't have a time in mind (my goal was just to get out and enjoy it), but I had vaguely thought that under 12 hours would be preferable, having read several write ups that had taken longer than this.

I decided to do the route on a bit of a whim really. While the idea had been floating around for a while, I hadn't set a date for it or done any recces. I picked the day because it was a free weekend (a rarity these days). It also happened that Robbie was on his taper for Old County Tops, so he could drop me off in Broughton Mills and pick me up from Keswick. He then also agreed to provide road support at Wrynose Pass and Honister Pass, which I was very grateful for, especially given how hot it ended up being. With this being such a spur of the moment decision, I wasn't prepared for it. I hadn't tapered (only two days prior I had done a 16-mile Long Duddon recce).

I was nervous as Robbie dropped me off. While I had run the distance before, this was more elevation than I'd ever done, and I'd never run this far on my own. My main concern was nav — without Robbie and his OS app, I was dependent on my watch and a good old-fashioned map and compass. Plus, there were sections of the route I'd never done before.

Broughton Mills was silent at 7 am when I started. It was set to be a hot day, but there was still a bit of the night chill, so I set off wearing my long sleeve. It was very odd setting off on my own. Although Broughton Mills was somewhere I knew well, here on my own early in the morning, it felt unfamiliar.

I set off at a steady pace up the incline of the road and through the woods. However, when the trail came out onto the fell side, I already found myself doubting the way. I was used to coming down this way from the Dunnerdale route, but finding my way up proved more difficult. I was unable to find the racing line up, instead picking another slightly less direct route to the top.

It was already too hot for my long sleeve, which I took off and stashed in my bag as I ran between Great Stickle

and Stickle Pike. Here I did feel confident navigating, and I felt a tingle of excitement as I swiftly picked my line around the bog before the steep pull up to the top. I ate some Haribo Tangfastics on the climb, deciding the earlier I started fuelling the better.



The top of Stickle Pike with Caw looming ahead

It already looked like a beautiful day, and I was buzzing as I flew over Kiln Bank Cross towards Caw, which now seemed to be looming rather large ahead of me. Caw was only a small fell to be quickly nipped up after work, but now it seemed insurmountable and craggy. I disagreed with my watch here, deciding I could take a route that meant I could stay higher. I was wrong. While I did make it to the top of Caw, it was far from the optimal line, and I had lost time doing so.

The next section was another one that I knew could prove tricky navigationally. I needed to get to White Maiden, just beyond White Pike, which looked like a wall of rock in the distance. I remembered what Robbie said about not going over Pikes, so used this to pick my line, keeping it to the right. A trod appeared and disappeared, and I got my feet wet through some bog, but things were going okay until I had another fall out with my watch. My watch reckoned I needed to go right, but I thought I needed to go straight up. After consulting my map, I eventually conceded that my watch was indeed correct: I needed to follow the contour round before gaining height.

It wasn't long though until I went wrong again, cutting off too early up the fellside, but after once again getting my map out, I traversed (skirting some slightly hairy cliffs) until I was by the beck I needed to climb up. From here, I followed the wall up and along to White Maiden.

I was cross at the significant time I had already lost, but also pleased that I had managed to self-correct using the map. I knew the rest of this leg would be straightforward in terms of nav, so I pressed onwards, dropping down to the Walna Scar road.

The ascent to Dow Crag was hard, but I felt good, and I appreciated the cool breeze. I enjoyed the lofty scramble to the summit before picking my way down to the col between Dow and Coniston Old Man. It was another slog up to the Old Man, but I enjoyed overtaking hikers as I climbed onto the ridge and gleefully ran to the top. I sent Robbie a voicenote to update him on my progress, before turning back towards Brim Fell.

The ridge between the Old Man and Swirl How is joyously runnable. Having had a couple of slow miles, it was wonderful to gather some speed here and I felt like I was flying as I ran past Brim Fell before climbing Swirl How. I was already a third of the way in, and, despite the nav errors, I was making good time. Plus, it was all downhill from here to the Wrynose Pass, where I could fill up my water and get more food.

The descent from Swirl How and Great Carrs was trickier than I'd expected, but I eventually joined a beautiful grassy descent to the three shires stone. Here, I could see Robbie's car parked, and as I tumbled down the fellside, I spotted Robbie walking out to meet me. I hopped over the stepping stones and flung myself at the car to refuel.



Arriving at Wrynose Pass

First of all, I gulped down some water with electrolytes, before smashing some salt and vinegar crisps in my mouth. Meanwhile, Robbie got out the sunscreen, as the sun was now beating down with full force. It was an amazing morale boost to see Robbie. It made me feel like a proper athlete having road support.

I was well up on my vague 12-hour schedule, but keen not to waste too much time, I grabbed my bagel and set off for the next leg of my journey. 12 and a half miles in, I was feeling pretty good, but I knew I had the hardest section to come. From here, the ground was going to get rockier and there were going to be some brutal climbs. To get to Honister, I was going to have to focus, so I set off with a steely determination.

The first climb of the leg up to Cold Pike was a slog off-piste through bog. It was slow going, as with each step I sunk into the ground and had to drag my sodden foot back out again. There was a faint trod at times, but I set my sights on reaching the summit before a group of hikers on the path from Pike O'Blisco.

However, having reached what I thought was the top, I saw another rocky knoll not far away. I visited both to be on the safe side. On the second top, I chatted to a man who was asking me what I was doing. He was suitably impressed when I explained, but the resulting ego boost led to another nav error, as I realised I was dropping too low instead of staying high on the runners' trod. I chided myself as I changed course to get onto the correct trod, which was runnable, albeit boggy.

The next section over Crinkle Craggs was excellent. After leaving the bog behind, it felt more like mountain

running, with some lofty views and fun scrambly bits. I'm never quite sure which of the Crinkle Craggs is the top top, as there are several summits to go over, but it was brilliant picking my way past walkers. I contemplated doing the Bad Step, but as I was on my own, decided it was perhaps best to play it safe, and took the path round.

From the top of Crinkle Craggs, I sent Robbie a voicenote to update him, and also to ask him to bring some fruit and coke to Honister. I was now feeling the heat of the red-hot sun.

The way off Crinkle Craggs is tricky, with many boulder fields to negotiate. I panicked for a minute after turning my ankle on one boulder, but after rotating it a couple of times, was satisfied I hadn't done any real damage and pressed on.

I'm not very good at descending rough terrain, but I was glad to get a bit more speed up as I passed the three tarns before beginning the rocky trudge up Bow Fell. Here, I was feeling the heat, but I kept drinking lots of water and electrolytes, knowing I could refill later. I took the climb slowly, but kept motivated by gradually overtaking hikers. After a final scramble, I reached the top, and briefly took in the spectacular views of the full Lake District, before gingerly finding my way down the boulder field, eventually picking up a more runnable trod towards Esk Pike.

Here, I became aware of a group of male fell runners not far behind me. I spent most of the run up to Esk Pike expecting to be overtaken, but managed to hold them off as I marched to the summit and stumbled down the tricky scrambly path. Once the way became more runnable, I widened the distance between me and the group, but after missing the point where you peel off towards Great End, they caught me as I cut across to the correct route.



The ascent of Great Gable

Here, I learnt that they were Swaledale Runners supporting their friend doing the Joss Naylor Challenge. From Great End, I had been planning to run back on myself to Esk Hause before descending (unaware there was a better route), but I was delighted when they invited me to tag along with them going straight over Great End on a more direct route. It was wonderful getting to chat to them. One of the best things about this sport is getting

to bond with people over a shared love of the fells and running. I was certainly grateful of their company as we made our way over a particularly precarious descent.

I was sorry to leave them behind at Sty Head Tarn as they stopped at a support point, but I was keen to get the next slog out of the way. I knew the climb up Great Gable was going to be hellish. However, having mentally prepared for the long, steep climb helped, as I focussed on putting one foot in front of the other. I spotted a couple of lads in trail-running packs just ahead of me, so that gave me something to focus on. The climb was long and hard, but I knew I was smashing it. I was taking it slowly, but I knew I was going to make it. I had worked it out in my head that if I could make it to the top of Great Gable, I would definitely make it to Honister, and if I could make it to Honister, then I would make it to the finish.

The feeling of elation I got as I reached the top of Great Gable was magical. Wastwater looked so beautiful that I wished I could linger longer, but I was acutely aware of the can of coke awaiting me at Honister, so I began the technical descent to the col between Great Gable and Green Gable. For me, this was the trickiest descent so far, with scree and shale making it hard to gain any speed.

Eventually, I made it down and began climbing Green Gable, where I was delighted to see Robbie, who had run out to join me on the couple of miles into Honister. It was lovely to have some company here. I had been enjoying myself so much that I had forgotten to be tired, plus my constant efforts at eating and drinking were paying off. I had barely noticed that I was now over 21 miles in.



Meeting Robbie atop Green Gable

It was great to visit Brandreth and Grey Knotts with Robbie, as it meant we both ticked off two new Wainwrights. After the rocky terrain of the high fells earlier on the leg, I had been looking forward to the grassy descent on the Bob line to Honister. Unfortunately, Robbie didn't realise this line existed, and instead directed me down a rocky path that was much less fun and resulted in me being a little grumpy.

Any grumpiness was replaced with gratitude as I gulped down the coke at the car and stuffed as much melon in

my mouth as possible. I didn't stop here long, as I knew I was close to finishing now. I was over 23 miles in, and had just 9 miles to go.



Grumpy with the line down to Honister

As I set off up Dale Head, I watched enviously as a Bob Graham runner came flying down the grassy trod I had been fantasising about earlier. The trudge up Dale Head was slow going, but I knew it wouldn't be long before I needed to peel off to meet Dale Head tarn. This was a lesser-used route, and my feet became very wet in the bog, but I was able to keep up a decent pace.

From Dale Head Tarn, I began the push up to High Spy. This would be my final big climb of the whole route, and I couldn't quite believe how well I was doing. Some walkers asked how far I'd been running, and I looked at my watch to see I'd been going for 25 miles. Almost a marathon completely in the fells!

From the top of High Spy, I felt great. It was boiling hot, but I had already come so far, and the views were spectacular. The running towards Maiden Moor was glorious as more of Derwentwater and Skiddaw came into view. I enjoyed this section and took my usual shortcut to the col between Maiden Moor and Cat Bells.



Gorgeous views of Cat Bells, Derwentwater and Skiddaw

As I began the ascent to Cat Bells, the final summit of my journey, I began checking in with myself to see how I felt. I realised that I felt no more tired than I had last time I was on this same ridge, having run less than half the

distance. Despite the heat and the ascent, I was having a really good time, and my decision to take it slow and steady had paid off. I would subsequently find I actually got a PR on the descent of Cat Bells.

Summiting Cat Bells was a special moment, and I paused briefly to voicenote Robbie and take in a view of Derwentwater, before negotiating the scramble down. It would have been nice to fly down here, but Cat Bells is actually a bit tricky to descend, and I did have one near miss where my journey could have ended prematurely. However, I soon found myself on the grassy ridge. The Cumbrian Traverse was in the bag now, and I realised that if I could push it a bit on the final two miles, I might get in under eleven hours. I hadn't been keeping an eye on time at all throughout my journey, as I was keen to take it slowly and just enjoy myself, but now I had a target set, I decided I may as well meet it.

I was sad to leave the fells behind as I hit the trail, but here was my chance to get some real running in. I didn't let myself linger and began pushing out the final couple of miles. My watch chimed 30 miles just as I ran past some very fluffy alpacas, which spurred me on.

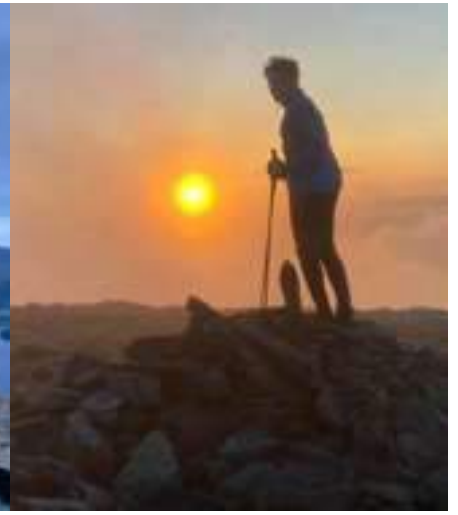
The run through Portinscale is one I'm familiar with, so I knew I was on the home stretch. The final run into Keswick is always thrilling. You pass tourists who are clueless as to what you've just done, but when you're so close, it's hard not to run with a massive grin. The Moot Hall was in sight when I frustratingly had to stop for a minute to let some cars come by. However, this gave me the energy I needed for a sprint to the Moot Hall where Robbie was waiting, phone camera in hand. I touched the door, posed for the camera and let out a sigh of satisfaction. I had done it. On my own. Under 11 hours. And I'd had the best time doing it.



Tired, sunburnt, but satisfied

I hadn't felt tired at all up to this point, but now it did occur to me how much I would like to sit down. After changing clothes, we sat outside the same pub we'd sat outside when we did the Tea Round and ordered some food. I was beginning to feel rather exhausted, but a pint of beer soon set me to rights.

It really was the most wonderful day out in the fells. It was amazing to do something under my own steam, but most of all, this run restored my confidence.



When BCR met John

Part Two!

by Gavin Lloyd

"He's giving it another go!" Charmian whispered to me back in January at the freezing cold Kendal Winter League race on Birkrigg Common. "He's thinking of going again in May. Do you fancy being involved again?"

"Absolutely!" I replied. John Kelly, top ultra-runner and La Sportiva athlete, back for more. After failing to complete the Wainwrights round last year in the searing heat, John was now planning JK Wainwrights Part 2 in May 2022. If you missed my first article, critically acclaimed of course, with one reader saying, "Yeah it was alright," then here is a brief summary of the challenge. It is a gruelling 326 miles with 36,000 m of ascent, with the record held by Sabrina Verjee at 5 days, 23 hours and 49 minutes! John Kelly is certainly up to the task, being one of the very few finishers of the Barkley Marathons, winner of many ultras, current Pennine Way record holder (he couldn't let Damian Hall have that for too long) and poster boy for Italian outdoor brand La Sportiva. John also very recently finished an exceptional 10th in the Hardrock 100 Ultra. It's worth noting this was a stacked field with the world's best ultra-runners competing, including Francois D'Haene, Dakota Jones and Kilian Jornet. Kilian won the race and set a new incredible course record of 21:36:24 for the clockwise course, and Courtney Dauwalter set a new female course record of 26:44:36, finishing an amazing sixth overall in the field. So, John did good!

Anyway, a few months later, an email comes through from John to all proposed pacers, alongside his very detailed schedule/spreadsheet. You can tell he is a data analyst, as nothing is left to chance and all is in a bag or a box, timed and calculated... even the amount of maple syrup to be consumed! Looking at the schedule this time, it was clear that John was out to

break the Wainwrights record by a considerable margin, and some top runners and pacers were going to be out in support too. Kim Collinson, Jasmin Paris, Sabrina Verjee, Nicky Spinks and Steve Birkinshaw to name a few. A certain Damian Hall was also lurking in the depths of the 100+ people on the WhatsApp group too, so watch this space everyone.

This time, I was set to nav legs 6 and 7. As I know leg 7 well now, after last time, recceing leg 6 was a priority with 3 weeks to go to the attempt. Leg 6 sets off from the Hardknott pass layby and takes in Harter Fell and Green Crag. To Harter fell it is the Long Duddon race route backwards until the downhill leads you to a stile that you hop over into the continuous, smelly bog to Green Crag. This is then when things get interesting. Recceing leg 6 proved to be bogtastic and it seemed that finding the path early off the summit of Green Crag would be the fastest way down to the woods and the start of leg 7. With everything set, the only major thing to sort out was the time off work, which, as I am a teacher, could be an issue. As this wasn't a wedding or special occasion, all I could do was ask and see what happened. Luckily, my head teacher was brilliant about it and said yes I could have the day off on one condition: that I promise to do an assembly about it all afterwards. "Agreed!" Crafty really, as it meant she didn't have to do an assembly that week.

"John has set off." The message was followed by a string of other messages and constant checking of the tracker. Is he ahead? Is he behind? How is it going? He kept up with his aggressive schedule initially and then fell slightly behind, but he was still ahead of the record when the day came — Tuesday 10th May 2022. Driving to the start on Hardknott Pass, I drove past Charmian,

Steve and Jen Scotney, who were waiting at the bottom, changing over kit into Jen's smaller van, as Charmian and Steve planned to drive to the start of leg 7 at the Duddon road crossing.

I found the layby at the top of the pass and began the waiting game with my fellow pacer Tom Hill. Suddenly, Jasmin Paris and John loomed into view coming down to meet us; Jen had prepared him a burger and food spread in the layby, with a fresh change of shoes, as John had learnt his lesson from last time. The tracker and food were thrust into our bags alongside everything else John might need and off we went. Me out in front and trail runner Tom Hill following alongside John. Following the fence line, joining the path up to the top of Harter fell and then running as a three in great conditions down to the stile, with everything feeling very calm and relaxed now. We chatted about John's recent European train trip with his young family. They visited Pisa, Rome, the Vatican and Paris. We also agreed that, wherever you go, you always find a McDonalds!



Follow the leader! Crossing the river at the end of Leg 6

The Bogtasticness of the approach to Green Crag was a squelch back to reality. Yet, skirting round the wet lands near the top worked a treat and finding the quad bike track early off the summit was an absolute god send, leading directly down to the fell gate and forest below, again following the start of the long Duddon as you follow the stream down. Topics of conversation turned to other interests and enjoying sport. John shared his passion for all things sweet and his love of ice cream. One thing that has stuck with me is how focused John was from here. In the zone. Quiet and just putting one foot in front of the other and then, as Tom and I were getting to know each other, Tom being a university lecturer, John would join in, proving that he had been listening intently to everything. It was also clear that John gets comfort

from crunching the numbers, talking openly about his scheduled times, which he had written down on a piece of paper. Crossing the river via the stepping-stones and climbing slightly to the leg 7 change over at Duddon Road, John was seeing numbers. Talking to me about timings and projected timings and feet of ascent and calories and the all-important weather. After a while, you realise that he isn't talking to you; it's more to himself as a numerically calculated pep talk, with you just there to provide the reassurance and support. A quick change, a few bites of Charmian's macaroni cheese pie invention and a meet and greet with new pacer Nathan Ball, then we were off again. With adrenaline from the success of leg 6, John more than me was feeling positive and again calculating how the leg split from leg 6 was bang on and that something similar here on leg 7 would help things later on. No pressure then.



The start of Leg 7

Leg 7 basically links all of the Coniston fells, starting with Dow Crag and Coniston Old Man. Then Brim Fell, Grey Friars, Great Carrs, Swirl How and Wetherlam, before descending down to Tilberthwaite. The top of Dow Crag came along fast; Nathan and I chatted about his previous sporting achievements in football and his aim to give the Bob Graham round a go. Skirting up to Coniston Old Man on the BCR social run line worked a treat again, and here Nathan waited for us as we did the slight out and back to the top of the Old Man. Here, John asked, "Gavin, can you settle something here for me?" "Erm, yes John," I replied, feeling puzzled yet intrigued. "Is it Coniston Old Man or the Old Man of Coniston?" "Ah... well it's either really John," I began. "I would say Coniston Old Man, but a lot of people just say 'the Old Man'." "Weird name though, isn't it?" John concluded and, with a chuckle and a smile, on we went to re-join Nathan and reel in Brim Fell. Unfortunately, the light was now fading and we were running ever closer to a cloud of thick clag that soon consumed us, as I nervously found the direct path that gradually curves its way downhill to the climb up Grey Friars. John was now quiet and focused again, but listening closely to

Nathan and I discussing his very interesting job designing fancy packaging for gin bottles and.... dog food packaging. He described the importance of colours used, pitching the ideas to a brand and sometimes how a company might dismiss your design just because the font is too small or other minor details. Grey Friars brought us out of the clag and we reached for our head torches at the summit. Nathan found John's head torch in my bag and John put it on. He then proceeded to pee whilst Nathan now searched in the depths of my bag for my head torch. After doing his business, John just shot off, as I wrapped my head torch around my forehead and both Nathan and me were left to play catch up. Great Carrs brought us back into the clag and, turning round at the summit to point our Wainwrights train towards Swirl How, we battled through the wind, which had luckily been largely at our backs for the past hour. This made communicating difficult, and John and Nathan just followed my feet, which is nerve wracking when it's now all down to the one with the map.

Thankfully, making the ascent to Swirl How and dropping down Prison Band brought us mostly out of the wind, but the clag had now made the rocks slippery and being slightly more cautious but still aiming to move quickly was now the aim of the game. In sections though, when the route down was unclear, John and I openly discussed where our next move should be, and we inevitably reached the junction below. Another quick sip of Tailwind energy drink from John and it was now time for the last summit, Wetherlam. The path though was unclear initially, as signs of path restructuring from Fix the Fells was evident. However, now with everything pitch black and cloudy, the Fix the Fells team had placed numerous orange markers to show where the path should be, with each one in sight of the other, one every 20 metres or so. The pegs were an absolute god send; everything for the past 5 and a half hours or so had gone pretty well, but I still felt anxious thinking about how a nav error now would put a dampener on everything. Yet, the pegs led to the clear route to the summit and the undulating track that during JK W1 had been in the early morning sunrise, was now just a pile of rocks in the darkness and a right turn to find Steel Edge.



Approaching the top of Wetherlam on Leg 7

"Just get to the tarn and the start of the descent," is what I kept thinking to myself, as conversation was still minimal due to the conditions. The wind was now again in our faces. The tarn found and the ground now falling away from us sharply at the top of Steel Edge, I took a hunch that the scree gully that leads to the rocky sweeping right turn bit and then the start of the superb grassy path that is like running down the spine of a turtle, was to our left. Yet, in the dark, this was not the case. A minor adjustment and a slight slip from me, which later on left a bruise, and we were back on track, winding our way down to the river crossing, which was a relief for me, as I knew that it was all plain sailing from here down to our finish line. One of a handful though for John, who still had many legs and many miles left to cover on his journey.



Before we entered the clag on Leg 7

Jen Scotney had again laid out the chair and a lovely food spread for John, which he bypassed and slumped down into the camping chair, where Jen began to untie his shoes and assess his feet. Shortly beforehand at the top of the steps I thanked John for allowing us to be part of his attempt and wished him the very best of luck for the rest of the week. Nathan and I then passed over the tracker, remaining food and orange dry bags full of spare kit to the next set of pacers, one of whom was Charlie Day of Ambleside, who was on leg 8 last time. We shared a déjà vu joke between us and chatted about his recent Lap Around The Lakes run. Fixing John's broken lightweight pole was now a priority though, as Jen said she did not have a spare. A handy piece of gaffer tape did the trick though and we waved them off a few moments later when John emerged from the camping chair ready to go again. Something which he undoubtedly did many more times too. Incredible mental strength and endurance!

Finally, I shook Nathan's hand and said I'd help him with his BG attempt in June (sadly an unsuccessful attempt), before getting changed into my spare kit in the boot of my car. Thoughts then turned to my pending 6 am get up for work and my 9:30 assembly. After a maximum of 3 hours sleep, I prepped my short PowerPoint presentation

in our school hall with all of our Key Stage 2 children in front of me (Years 3-6 — approximately 96 kids). Unsure how they would receive it, they were very interested in the route looking like a big brain and how he was doing it all in one go. A few of the older children shared how they had so far done a handful of the Wainwrights with their family and hoped to do more. You never know — maybe there was at least one child in the room feeling inspired to one day give it a go themselves or take up our fantastic sport. That would be enough for me.

I finished off the week by going to watch John stride out up the cobbled street to climb the steps of the Moot Hall in Keswick to break the record in 5 days, 12 hours, 14 minutes, and 42 seconds. That's an impressive 11 hours faster than the previous record held by Sabrina Verjee. Chatting to him afterwards, he said he was just trying to take in his achievement, as it hadn't sunk in yet. I think the pint of Wainwright, pizza and of course ice cream helped though. Incredible stuff! With so many people helping and aiding the attempt, it did put into perspective how many people are needed to make an attempt a success and, before John moved back to the US to be closer to family, he was presented with a book of memories from his Wainwrights record. This included many anecdotes and stories from the week. Here are the highlights below:

From Leg 11:

- “Ugh – it’s so far. Why can’t the summits come to me? Lazy pieces of sh*t!”

From leg 18 (which our very own Tim Ripper was on):

- Sam: “So, I hear you are training to be a vicar, Charlie.”

Charlie: “Yeah, that’s right.”

John Kelly: “I’m so sorry for all my swearing.”

Charlie: “Don’t worry mate.”

Ten seconds later: “F**ck, Sh*t, Oh God, F**k, Sh*t!”

- John put on waterproof trousers and said, “The best thing about running with over-trousers is” ...kicks a nettle... “F**k you nettles — what are you going to do?”
- Finally, as Tim knows, Mungrisdale was semi-aquatic!

From Leg 20:

- Skirting below Skiddaw in the clag: “There isn’t a bakery or cake shop that’s not in danger on the drive back south,” added John.
- “This was the closest experience to supporting a birth that’s not been supporting a birth. Very primal, guttural moans with general low-level dark mutterings, sometimes about food we didn’t have and sometimes just general pain, interspersed with moments of lucidity and random thoughts about TV programmes. A class act!”

Leg 25 (the final leg):

- Sabrina Verjee: I think John didn’t have the right people for the final leg if he wanted sympathy then. At one point, he stopped, stared down at his feet, saying he had never wrecked his body so badly and he was in so much pain. My response? “I jolly well hope so if you’re going to smash my record by 12 hours.”

Great stuff and a brilliant thing to be a small part of, showing that if at first you don’t succeed, try and try again!

