

## Achille Ratti Long Walk - 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2017 – Wainwright's Central Fells in a day by Natasha Fellowes and Chris Lloyd

I know a lot of fell runners who are happy to get up at silly o'clock to go for a day out. I love a day out but I don't love the early get ups, so when Dave Makin told me it would be a 4am start this time for the annual Achille Ratti Long Walk, the idea took a bit of getting used to. The route he had planned was the Wainwright's Central Fells. There are 27 of them and he had estimated the distance at 40 ish miles, which also took some getting used to. A medium Long Walk and a short Long Walk had also been planned but I was keen to get the miles into my legs.

So after an early night, a short sleep and a quick breakfast we set off prompt at 4am in cool dry conditions from Bishop's Scale, our club hut in Langdale. Our first top, Loughrigg, involved a bit of a walk along the road but it passed quickly enough and we were on the top in just under an hour. The familiar tops of Silver Howe and Blea Rigg then came and went as the sun rose on the ridge that is our club's back garden. I wondered whether anyone else at the hut had got up yet.

The morning then started to be more fun as we turned right and into new territory for me. I had not been to Tarn Crag or approached Helm Crag from this direction before and it's always nice to discover new lines. Helm Crag is a great top and fun too with a bit of a scramble at the summit. I nearly had to stay there because I got my hips stuck in a crack on the descent! Gibson Knott followed easily as we trotted along the ridge path and it was at this point that we realised there was no way we'd make it to the butty stop by 10am. It was 7.52 and the butty stop was at the north end of Thirlmere with 6 tops to tick off in between. Miraculously, we managed to find enough phone signal to get a message to Dot Wood, our butty stop captain, telling her that 10 am was more likely to be 12pm.

Then we were back on very familiar Bob Graham leg 3 territory, albeit backwards, ticking off Calf Crag (where we had the only bit of mist of the whole day) and Steel Fell before a steep descent to Wythburn and Old County Tops territory. We stopped at the river crossing to fill up water bottles and have a bite to eat before tackling what I thought was the toughest climb of the day (until I rethought later) on the way to Ullscarf.

Ullscarf was the first in a series of unremarkable tops on a gently undulating boggy tussocky 'ridge' stretching from Langdale to Keswick. I spent some time wondering why they are on Wainwright's list; in particular Armboth Fell is a bit underwhelming while an unnamed craggy hill about a km to the south is more impressive but is not on his list. However, we were going well, the weather and visibility were great and we were having a good time.

After Armboth Fell and High Tove we made our way down into the woods on the west side of Thirlmere and finally reached the lovely and easily accessible Raven Crag where we were rewarded with stunning views and warm sunshine at 11.09 am. From there it was a short descent to the dam and over the A591 to a little car park and our first butty stop. Dot was there ready with brews and butties, cake and fruit. Dave Reynolds was there providing banter and laughs. Oz was suffering badly by now with recurring back pain and was

wrangling with himself whether to quit and save his back or to carry on which is what he really wanted.



Raven Crag, photo by Chris Lloyd

We had a good rest for about half an hour and then all carried on along St John's Beck and up through bracken onto the very pleasant grassy ridge for High Rigg, another great top and well worth a visit.

There Oz reluctantly decided to call it a day and make his own way to Watendlath, our next butty stop. 6 of us carried on, taking the main tourist path up Walla Crag (photo) which was busy with good reason, being a fantastic spot with flat rocks, sunshine and beautiful views over Derwent water. It would have been good to stay a while longer but time was passing and we had a chilli to get back for.



Walla Crag, photo by Tash Fellowes

There was a good path from Walla Crag to Bleaberry Fell back on the Central Fells 'ridge', a fairly impressive looking hill from that side. Our feet were beginning to get sore now but our spirits were still high and able to cope with the tussocks and bog across to High Seat where we stopped at about 2.30 to have a bite, admire the view and consider our route onwards. There were 2 options: carry on to High Tove which we had already visited and from there take the obvious path down to Watendlath, or cut across and shorten the route. We chose the latter, wrongly. Half an hour later we arrived, relieved, with calves shredded and ankles battered by the heather and tussocks. That's one to remember for next time.

Dot was there again with more tea and butties, and Oz had just arrived after hoofing it along the road which had turned out to be quite hilly. We had another good rest for about 20 minutes and replenished our water.

Refreshed again we climbed up out of Watendlath, passing a heavily laden group of kids out on their Bronze Duke of Edinburgh expedition. I'm always impressed by any kid who does Duke of Edinburgh and then *still* enjoys going out on the fells; carrying such a lot of heavy and often ill-fitting kit must really make a dent in the enjoyment of the experience.

When we got to the top of Grange Fell we could see a tiny top in the distance and realised that that was Sergeant Man. It was 3.30pm and time to press on. Next was Great Crag, another pleasant rocky top with two summits. Wainwright says that the south summit is the higher of the two. There's not much in it and we went to both, just to be on the safe side.

Over the previous few weeks, Dave, Tony, Oz and Andy Pooler had spent some time recceing our route, and the only part that had not been recce'd was between Great Crag and Eagle Crag. We took a thigh-destroying steep rocky path down to the campsite at

Stonethwaite but missed a grassy trod that was only visible from the bottom of the valley once we'd started the climb up Eagle Crag. Another one to remember for next time.

Eagle Crag is an impressive hill from the valley and it's a brutal climb after 35 miles, the hardest climb of the day I thought. Although there is a trod it was relentlessly steep and then a series of cruel hairpins up some rocky shelves that teased our tired legs until we finally topped out onto a fabulous flat rock and enjoyed the late afternoon sunshine at 17.20.

Sergeant Crag is just a stone's throw from Eagle Crag so we ticked that one off swiftly and then headed back towards High Raise. It was a great feeling of relief to be coming 'home'. By now everyone was beginning to feel the miles, finding it harder to eat and drink, feeling the pain in feet and joints. But the peace, the clear weather and the beautiful views kept our spirits up.

The climb to High Raise is long and steady, but finally we got there shortly after 6 pm in a cold wind, and huddled in the shelter waiting to regroup. Feeling comfortable on home turf we quickly visited Sergeant Man, and then on to Thunacar Knott via Pavey Ark and then the Langdale pikes. We met a lone orienteer on Harrison Stickle looking for Loft Crag at 7pm. After pointing him in the right direction we hoped he'd be ok - it seemed a bit late to be out on an event.

Going up Pike o' Stickle I began to see stars and had a bit of a low point, having to rest on each step of the scrambly ascent. However a gel fixed that problem pretty quickly and I felt fine again as we topped Loft Crag and congratulated each other - we had done it! It was 19.21. A quick trot down the Dungeon Ghyll path took us back to the road and we reached Bishop's Scale just before 8pm, 46 miles and 2 minutes under 16 hours after we started. Walking in, we were greeted by a kitchen full of ratti members of all ages enjoying Tony's chilli after their own day out on the medium Long Walk, a 19 mile section of the Central Fells.

Andy's GPS registered 4500 m of ascent before it ran out of battery but that was pretty close to home so we'll go with that number which works out at 14763 feet.

My tracker gave us a moving time of 13:28 hours, which I like but I'm not sure I trust. Our 6 who completed the long walk were: Dave Makin, Andy Pooler, John Morrisey, Rob Green, Chris Lloyd and Tash Fellowes. Many thanks to Dave Makin, Tony Shanley and Dot Wood for a good day out.