

26 Lakes, Meres and Waters

Dave Makin and Andy Pooler

On the 11th July 2011, Dave Makin and Andy Pooler, two members of the Achille Ratti Climbing Club together completed what was only the fifth circuit of this Lakeland route. The route involves visiting all the 26 Lakes, Waters and Meres (excluding Kentmere Reservoir), as shown on the 1966 edition One Inch Ordnance Survey Map of the English Lake District.

Loweswater. Crummock Water. Buttermere. Ennerdale Water.
Wast Water. Devoke Water. Goat's Water. Low Water. Levers Water. Coniston
water. Esthwaite Water. Elter Water. Grasmere.
Rydal Water. Windermere. Skeggles Water. Haweswater. Small Water. Blea
Water. Hayeswater. Brothers Water. Ullswater. Thirlmere. Derwent Water.
Bassenthwaite Lake. Over Water.

It was devised and first run in the early eighties by two friends: Peter Schofield, a Life Member of the former illustrious fell running club, Horwich RMI Harriers; and Leo Pollard the founder of the fell running section within the Achille Ratti Climbing Club. In the intervening thirty years or so, and before the two completions this year, only two further successful attempts have taken place. The first of these was by Alan Heaton of Clayton Le Moors Harriers and the second by Joss Naylor both, again, in the early eighties.

The 26 Lakes, Meres and Waters route was devised by Leo Pollard and Peter Schofield. Leo was the first to complete it 30 years ago followed by Peter and Alan Heaton and Joss Naylor. The route takes in all 26 of the Lakes, Meres and Waters covering approximately 100 miles with 22500 feet of ascent.

Leo was delighted that we'd taken on his challenge to celebrate the 30th anniversary of his successful route and after 28 years since the last attempt.

LEG 1

Loweswater-Wast Water

The car journey to the start was quiet, not the normal atmosphere for an Achille Ratti weekend run. We arrived at Loweswater at 8.30am, found a place to park, got out of the car and touched the water.

After 2 years of planning and many recce days we were finally on our way. Now full of anticipation at the prospect of the 2 long days ahead our mood lightened as we began. We left Loweswater on a warm and sunny Friday morning which was shortly to turn into a hot summer's day and our first challenge of the day was to pass the highly recommended Kirk Stile Inn (the first of many inviting pubs we would pass over the course of the next hundred or so miles).

We were accompanied on this leg by Sean Makin, Cath Shanley and Arthur Daniels and soon we were making good time along the sides of Crummock Water and Buttermere. Our 1st big climb of the day was past Bleaberry Tarn and contouring around the summit of Red Pike where Cath and Arthur left us to enjoy the descent into Ennerdale.

Sean took the map and led us off the tops following a good grassy line to Ennerdale Water. In order to minimise our climbing we'd opted to go for the route up the valley bottom to Black Sail Pass and this seemed to go on for ever but brought the benefit of an easy climb over Black Sail Pass and an easy runnable descent into Wasdale Head. There we met our support team for some refreshments. Janet provided us with delicious home-made soup and tea which gratefully devoured and she loaded us up with sandwiches and drinks for our onward journey.

LEG 2

Wast Water-Coniston

Our 'guide' for the next leg, Tony Shanley, had been practising running in his sandals as he waited at Wasdale as he had left his running shoes at the Langdale hut, but (un)fortunately Mick and Kaz Howard had saved the day by going back to Langdale for them. Perhaps they should also have brought replacement kit for the 1970s running gear Tony proudly wears on the hill!

We were fortunate that we had reccied the first section of this leg already as Tony was determined to get us lost and we were relying more on Todd the dog for directions. The weather was hot now and we had to break into a trot as Sheila and Freda met us on the track to tell us that Leo and Austin were ahead. At Devoke Water we were met by Leo and Austin who gave us words of encouragement, but once they were out of sight we soon slowed down.

Some lovely paths led us into the Duddon Valley but we lost further time as Tony had to detour around the sheep hole in the wall that we had ducked through, much to everyone's amusement. We rescued a few lost Duke of Edinburgh girls on our travels through to Seathwaite and then began the long, very hot and sweaty climb up Walna Scar Road where we sat for 5 mins to enjoy a sandwich and the beautiful evening views.

We had not reccied the next section which was to visit Goat's Water, Low Water and Levers Water and this cost us some time as we contoured around the rocky slopes beneath Dow Crag and explored various quarries on the way. Fortunately the rock was dry otherwise it would have been a very interesting section but the temperature was now dropping and we were out of the sun all of the way around to Levers Water. A gentle trot down into and through Coniston saw us pass inviting pubs and onto another sit down at the top of Coniston Water where we ate Janet's delicious corned beef hash. A change of socks and footwear revealed plenty of blisters and raw patches but fresh, dry socks helps enormously.

LEG 3

Coniston Water - Windermere

We swapped Tony for Martin Kirkman for this leg and left Coniston at 21:50. This was the shortest leg at about 14 miles but we both found it the hardest going due to long sections of hard packed footpaths and road sections. More tempting pubs were ignored at Hawkshead and head torches were dug out from the bottom of the sacks. Under a beautiful star lit sky we slowly ticked off Elterwater, Grasmere and Rydal Water and the road sections were causing us both sore hips. We were getting cold as we ambled into the car park at Windermere and were glad of the heating in Arthur's van as we drank hot soup and tea. We left Martin to get some sleep and in his place we had two eager young bucks in Dave Jackson and James Lurati for company for the next 20 miles.

LEG 4

Windermere-Ullswater

We left Windermere at 02:50 via Jenkin Crag into Troutbeck and after an hour so we were able to get rid of the headtorches before heading up Garburn Pass and over to Kentmere where the valley bottom was covered in an eerie low hanging mist. Spirits were good now that dawn had arrived and

we were looking forward to another long day in the sun. A steady climb through the green Quarter of Kentmere brought us eventually to the very remote Skeggles Water, a place neither of us had heard of before we started looking at this route, but certainly worth a visit, especially on a day like today where the early morning the sun was hanging beautifully over a low mist on the water.

After successfully keeping our feet dry from Coniston we had no option but to get them wet in the marshy access to Skeggles Water and this brought back the rubbing of wet socks and grit to our long suffering feet.

Gatesgarth Pass seems long enough when done as a descent in the Lakeland 50/100 but as an ascent it seemed to drag for a long time. We were a couple of hours behind our scheduled time at this point and looking forward to the promised hot pies at Haweswater provided by Michael Pooler. A sign was taped to a gate on the descent to Haweswater

~~Hot Pies this way~~
~~Warm Pies this way~~
Cold Pies this way (probably)

directing us to a food stop, we were left with cold pies. Needless to say these went down very well anyway. We drank tea and refilled our bottles thanked our host and continued on lead by Dave and James.

The day was starting to warm up quite nicely and required the application of sun cream which ran annoyingly into the eyes on the climb up to High Street via Small water and Blea Water. Our plan was to follow the main tourist path off high Street down to Hayeswater but a combination of a beautiful morning and young Dave and James eager for a play encouraged us to take the steep grassy descent down to the south-eastern end of Hayeswater - not the best route for sore feet and probably not our wisest decision of the day.

A steady trot down and Brothers Water was soon ticked off and a combination of gentle running, walking and an ice lolly in Patterdale brought us, via Ullswater, to bacon butties and tea in Glenridding car park served by Janet and Jo Lee. We were feeling pretty good now as we knew we had one last big climb to complete an only another 25 miles to go. Feet were well tended to in Glenridding and fresh socks brought some welcome relief.

LEG 5

Ullswater - Overwater

We left Glenridding around midday suitably refreshed and full of tea and began the climb of Sticks Pass with Jeff Lea, Tash Fellowes and Tony having replaced James and Dave. A long, slow climb up Sticks Pass was followed by a good fast (or felt like fast!) run off to Legburthwaite and soon we were at Thirlmere. A brief stop where we collected Martin and Arthur and off we headed for Derwent Water. We'd assumed that our legs would be tired by this point and any saving in climbing would be appreciated so we headed along the A591 towards Castlerigg. As it happened our legs were in a good state and with hindsight the climb up and over Brackenrigg might have been the better option - perhaps next time!

As we made our way down through the woods, Derwent water soon arrived and we managed to pick our way through the tourists in Keswick to head out along the River Derwent towards Bassenthwaite Lake. Unfortunately the path leaves the river and there is no alternative but to use the busy A591. As if by magic Tony appeared in a layby with the van to drop Cath off to run the last few miles with us. We got to the shore of Bassenthwaite and were met by our support team who were enjoying a picnic near the beautiful church of St Cuthberts and then off we went to find Over Water.

Unfortunately Over Water is still about 5 miles distant and the country lanes seem to climb constantly. This is not ideal when you've got your head around the fact that your practically finished the day.

We got a view of Over Water about half a mile from the finish and managed a good run into the finish where a good crowd had gathered to watch and cheer us in.

We must say a big thank you to everyone at the Achille Ratti Climbing Club for their help and support before and during the day. Also our thanks to the owner of the land around Over Water who kindly gave their permission for us to access the water and without whom the completion of the route would not have been possible.

Ad Altoria

Dave and Andy