

Leo's Run

by Tony Marlow

In October 2017 I was attending the Joss Naylor Lakeland Challenge dinner at Santon Bridge, having made a successful sub 12 hour completion earlier that year. I managed to get Joss and Leo Pollard together to chat about the Lake, meres and waters challenge. This was a route devised and first completed by Leo in June 1981 in which the challenger is required to visit every body of water within the lake district whose name ends Lake, Mere or Water. Only 6 people, all male have completed the round since, Joss being the quickest by far at just over 19 hours. During this conversation he said that it was probably his greatest run. That was enough for me.

Leo sadly passed away not long afterwards so in his memory it was intention was to have as many Lostock AC members helping as I could (Leo was a former president of the club) , to cover the 100+ miles and 23000ft. What attracted me was that having had so few completions there is not really a 'set route' so as an orienteer I loved the route finding challenge.

Roll forward 20 months, and I arrived with my long-suffering wife Heather, and leg 1 pacers Mike Ernill, Kerry Varden and my eldest daughter Amie and her Boyfriend Lewis at the shores of Loweswater. It was 8am and it was already 20 degrees. A very runnable 4 miles along past Crummock and Buttermere saw Amie and Lewis peel off towards the Fish Inn and Kerry, Mike and myself push up the steep path up to Red Pike. Over and down to Ennerdale I was feeling great-too great. Months of planning was coming to fruition and the sun was shining! What's not to like! Mike kept telling me to slow down and I eventually dropped my pacers, waiting at Caw to re-join.

Wasdale came and a change of pacers. After refuelling on Rice pudding and tea and a hug from Heather Brian Halton and Chris Taylor led me through Eskdale to Devoke Water. Then my early keen pace, the unrelenting sun and 2 miles of boggy tussocks began to take their toll. On arrival at the bottom of Walna Sca I was really struggling and my mind had begun to think negatively. New pacers Adrian Hope and Mark Shuttleworth did their utmost to revive my spirits and despite a massive cramp attack which floored me for several minutes just above Low Water, we arrived at Coniston an hour down on schedule. Mark Edwards and Mark Sammon made up an all orienteers leg 4 and darkness began to creep in after Esthwaite water. This leg was quite surreal. Plenty of walking, Plenty of jokes and then Mark E's wife called at 1 am to tell him that her Dad had sadly passed away!

On Arival at Windermere I was finished. I couldn't believe how bad I felt and I was only just over half way round. I have run 100 miles on several occasions and never felt this bad at any time. I had eaten and drunk as much as a possibly could so couldn't understand why. I crawled into the car and slept for 15 minutes. Heather knocked on the window and said it was 'time'. I asked her to tell everyone that I couldn't go on... and she said 'no, you tell them'. That was the turning point. I couldn't bring myself to tell these guys that had shown so much belief in me that I was a quitter so with new pacers Josie Greenhalgh, Andy Ford and Pete McNulty I left Waterhead. Very soon the dawn came and my spirits lifted.

Troutbeck and Kentmere came and went and soon we were running around Birk Rigg towards the little known Skeggles water. I didn't even know this one existed until I started to research LM&W but on a sunny morning at 6am its has a beauty all its own. Haweswater, Small Water and Blea Water came and went before the trudge over High Street to Heyeswater. At this point Albert Sunter and his daughter Abigail met us who together with Rob Green, the administrator of the round would accompany me through Ullswater to Thirlmere.

Descending Sticks Pass I was concerned that I couldn't see any of the support team at Stanah, and having been on the go for the best part of 31 hours I started to panic. By the time I hobbled into the road crossing 20 minutes later Heather and the team had everything set up with warm tea, rice pudding and more cakes than you could throw a stick at. No Panic required!

My brother had come up from Norfolk to accompany me on the last leg, I'd asked him as he runs road marathons and large chunks of this final effort taking in Derwent Water, Bassenthwaite Lake and Over Water are on the Road. Chris Roberts navigated on this leg and we were soon passing Bassenthwaite church on the shores of the Lake. Joss had mentioned on that first chat that he was the only completer of the 6 who had run all the way up the final 6 miles and nearly 1000 feet of climb up to Overwater- not anymore!

On approaching Overwater tears began to well in my eyes as I could hear my supporters whooping and cheering. Leo's daughter Diane was standing on her own at the end of the road and after I'd jumped into the lake I ran up and gave her an almighty hug. I knew how much it meant to the family that I ran this in his memory and if it wasn't for her Dad I wouldn't have achieved this.

20 months in planning and 36 hours in execution I would thoroughly recommend this challenge. When I've spoken to people about it they have mistakenly presumed that it's a low level challenge to be done by elderly runners- well think again, Its one of the hardest things I've ever done and the one that makes me the most proud.