

My Winter Lakes, Meres and Waters Challenge

30th Nov/1st Dec

So where to start with this...

I'd never actually heard of this challenge, until my boss Mark mentioned it to me, fresh on the heels of my recent Bob Graham Round, trying to find something to do next.

I was really, really surprised to see that there had only ever been 7 challenges completed, but now looking back I can kind of see why, it's a bit mental like...

But being a sucker for crazy shit, 16yrs too young for the Joss Naylor challenge, and a few months away from my frog graham and paddy rounds, I decided to email Rob Green and inform him that I intend on making an attempt, but not just an attempt, that I was going to reduce my testicles to the size of sesame seeds in below zero temperatures and have a crack at the first winter attempt.

The day soon was approaching and I'd pulled together a fantastic team, my friend Chris had build all the GPS files we'd need, maps had been printed and we were all excited and looking forward to making a bit of Lakeland running history... then bang my friend and sports therapist Adam falls very ill, and I suddenly down a road support crew member, Adam had been the main man in my BGR just a few weeks before, but it couldn't be helped and I knew he'd still be there in thought and spirit.

Then 4 days to go, and I loose 2 support runners and another member of my road crew to illness /injury, What a nightmare, this winded me a little and I got the jitters for the second time about this event, the first time had been when one of close friends and favourite running/race buddy, Stevo told me that he wouldn't be able to be there or support a leg, this was hard, we've ran through so tough shit together, and he was everywhere I needed him in my BGR and clawed back the time I'd lost on previous legs, but again it couldn't be helped, just as it couldn't with Jacob my road support, or Phil and Alex 2 of my original support runners, if your I'll, injured or have prior commitments, it just can't be helped.

So I called on a few people and build the crew back up, it was all go for the first winter attempt again.

I barely got 4hrs sleep the night before due to excitement and slight nerves, but it didn't seem to affect me at all, and below is my account of my successful winter attempt, broken down into a mini report of each leg.

Leg 1 – Loweswater to Wasdale head

It's 5:55 and my road crew Rose and Scott, Along with my Pacer Howard are stood in Loweswater carpark, it minus 6 and bloody cold, I'm already questioning what the fook I'm doing with my life...

You know, I mean I could've still been in bed, in the warm sleeping off a Friday night out, instead of only having a few bevvies and now being stood in freezing temperatures, preparing to go and run 100 miles...

Rose and Scott wished us well, and me and Howard trotted off to the edge of the lake, at 6:07am the toe of my speedcross 4's touched the water of Loweswater, and boom the challenge was on.

We headed off down the track, chatting away, it was the first time I'd seen Howard for about a year, so we had a lot to chat about, we were at Crummock water by 6:40, and running the banks down towards Buttermere by 7:19, would have been there sooner, but with technology being the waste of bloody time it often is Howard's watch had given us a right little run around and was sending us back and forth, until we finally found the path up towards Red Pike, and was seemingly straight up it, I hadn't actually realised we crossed the summit, as I never actually look at maps or routes properly, preferring to go out blind into these things, and hadn't actually realised I would be bagging a new wainwright enroute, I was rather pleased with this as red pike had eluded me for a while, so was good to finally get that in the bag too. After a quick summit selfie we were soon hurtling down towards Ennerdale water, in the fresh light of dawn, soon stopped in our tracks by lots of scary cows, (bloody nightmare) I do believe that all runners are scared of cows, especially fell and trail runners. We slowly trotted past them, preparing to be eaten at any moment, truly very scary, so much in fact I could actually hear Howard's arse twitching! A quick shot on the banks of a sunrise lit ennerdale and it was full steam ahead to wasdale head to meet the road support for brekky, and join my fresh pacers for the leg 2.

We hit wasdale head at 10:30, a soggy bottom acquiring, descent from the path behind kirk fell.

A quick feed, kit change, and a thank you and hug for Howard, for getting through leg one, and I was off again.

Leg 2 – Wasdale head to Coniston

Running off towards Wastwater, porridge pot in one hand, flat coke in the other, now joined by new pacers little Dave and Alastair, we soon hit the shores of wastwater, dipping my toes at 10:40, the onwards along the slog out to Devoke water, (you know that lake, that's the equivalent of a binsey in a wainwright round). Actually I'd never actually been to devoke water, due to the fact that its in the arse end of nowhere, we ran along, chatting away, I was having a good catch up with them both and we were soon there, touching the shore at 12:22, quick pic, then it was that shitty song along the Seathwaite Road, now I like me a good bit of road running, coming from a predominant road marathon background, it's where I've ran most miles over the year, but this road is so flat and shitty, that you don't really go up a gear at all, and your hips are calling you a wanker everytime your foot strikes the ground.

Anyway onto the climb towards Coniston old man, to bag some of the higher bodies of water, and as always I'm saying hello to all and sundry, my poles are out at this point, just to save a bit of the legs, by putting the weight on the poles instead, then after saying hello to one particular person, I got the sarcastic reply of "keep going, your almost at the top of the climb and then you can sit down... (truly a dickhead, of hyacinth bucket proportions, if only he knew eh) I just shot him a filthy look, whilst imaging I was spearing him in the jacksie with one of my poles.

Taking the non-violent approach, I pushed on to Goats water, dipping my toes at 14:45, then a rather shitty, steep and slippery traverse above the old mines, to Low water, dipping my left toes this time at 15:22, and then another shitty traverse, where I was sure I might fall to my death this time due to the high levels of ice on the slanted sheep track we were following to reach Lever water, I hit the shore

thankfully still alive at 15:40, then I'd hope to open all cylinders and hammer down, but due to the amount of ice on both the actual paths and a lot of grass too, it was still quite slow going, til copper mines at least, then we were able to open up and hammer down the road, I hit Coniston water at 16:08, and headed off to meet the road support for a feed, change of clothes and collect fresh pacers.

Leg 3 – Coniston to Windermere

After a good feeding, quick kit change, hugs and thanks to Dave and Ali, and a surprise visit from my friends Graeme and Belle, I was nishing off towards Hawkshead with new pacers Amy and Adam, chatting away and catching up, I'm still in very high spirits, despite the time I'd lost due to conditions, and the going still slow due to temperatures dropping, darkness returning and everywhere icing up and making the going slow and tough, Adam and Amy both have pretty much the same sense of humour as me, so most of the time was spent laughing due to our conversations about each others most embarrassing sex stories and other stuff that couldn't be discussed in polite society, I would tell you, but a secret amongst pace team and runner, remains a secret.

We were soon in Hawkhead, where it was their lantern parade and light switch on, which was a welcome sight, and as much as I wished all the fanfare was for me, sadly it wasn't, and we bundled our way passed all the pissed up locals watching the pretty lights, and cracked on to Esthwaite water, dipping both toes at 17:14.

Off over to Skelwith, to pick up the Cumbria way and head off to dip a toe in Elterwater, I would've like to say that the cleanliness of the conversation between runner and pacers, had improved... but I'd be lying, so pottymouth pacers abound, I hit Elterwater at 18:31, it was at least minus 1 now, and the climb up red Bank was hilarious, giving the cast of bambi on ice a good run for their triple luts, we were taking 3 steps up hill, and skating back down 10, although these type of conditions soon warm you up and is hilarious, it also accumulated more time due to the tough conditions becoming harder.

We struggled up, and was soon hopping through deerbolt woods to bag the waters of Grasmere, at 19:11, and then onto Rydal at 19:36, then full steam to Windermere, the hardest part was during this section, where I had to run past my own front door, 50 miles in, knowing I still had 50 miles to go, I remained a big boy, and pressed on, hitting the shores of Windermere at 20:04, 2hrs later then I had originally planned, but this was due to the tough winter conditions, I don't think it had got much above zero all day.

A quick pic, then across the road to meet the road support, and Rob, Diane and Dave from the achille ratti, and have a good munch, change kit and pacers.

It was at this point I had the most emotional moment of the entire journey, one of my closest friends (and biggest inspiration) Chris called me, I knew he was going to, I had arranged it with him, but I had no idea just how choked up I would be chatting to him, although he said he couldn't believe how fresh I sounded, my eyes were glistening and I could feel my voice starting to crack. Chris always has so much belief in me and constantly drives me. Now although it was emotional, I can't explain how much that simple call and chit chat did for me, it really lifted my spirits and I knew should I get any dark moments or find it too hard all I had to do was call him for a boost.

Leg 4 – Windermere to Ullswater

It's pitch black and getting quite balmy, I'm heading up through skelgill woods on the long slog out to Skeggles water, with my leg 4 pacers Sean and my boss Mark, and his 2 dogs Gylly and Ben, this is the very mark who introduced me to this challenge, and I'm informing him just why I can now tell, just why there's only ever been 7 completions before, we slogged on through the conditions with more and more ice forming and temperatures dropping, smashing it out over the passes to Skeggles water, the night nav was obviously difficult, and was to be expected, we ended up going a bit wrong here and there, but you know it's all part of these things, it's not a marked 5k race complete with way markers after all, but we did get it sorted in the end and very nearly submerged my entire body in Skeggles due to all the ice on the shoreline at 23:26, onto Haweswater along more shitty frozen paths for a toe dip at 2:18, it's at least minus 5, and it's tough underfoot.

Pushing on, chatting away, snacking and shivering we made our way to Small water, for 3am, and Blea water for 3:41.

Then it got shitty, cos someone in their infinite wisdom, decided the route would take you over 4 bitching butresses, before hitting high Street, where it was minus 10, and all our balls were the size of sesame seeds...

Carrying on we struggled with worsening winter conditions, to descend down to dip at Hayeswater at 5:10, and brothers water at 5:48.

Conditions in Hartsop, Patterdale and Glenridding were horrendous, how our road support had got over Kirkstone pass beggars belief, you could see skid marks and tyre tracks across the road and paths, and just trying to stand up was hard without the thought of trying to run, but determined as always we shuffled on, dipping at Ullswater at 6:34, then onto meet my amazing road support who were waiting around in these bloody awful conditions for me, constantly reboiling water to make us cups and some hot food. A fantastic local sandwich shop, The Picnic Box, Ambleside had done loads of catering to support my challenge and we were very much looking forward to a good munch. I got inside the van (not that it was any warmer than outside) to get changed, wrap a blanket round for a moment and eat. I could feel myself getting comfortable here, and then I yawned for the first time in the whole challenge, so it was up, out the van and off again.

Leg 5 – Glenridding to Overwater

Heading up towards Sticks Pass we're all fucking freezing and questioning why we're out in minus 7, heading towards Thirlmere, we pushed on through the cold and bloody ice, (I knew I should have just been normal and just gone for an attempt in the summer when it was warm, but no... not bloody me) we were approaching the summit of Sticks Pass when the sun appeared, not that it brought any warmth with it, but it did give us some beautiful sunrise views all over.

Over the top and heading down to Thirlmere, we bumped into Jo from Voom nutrition, who was out for a morning run with a pal over the Dodds, a quick hug and I informed her of what I was doing, you know how I was 80 miles into this crazy first ever winter attempt of the LMW challenge, well her and her

friends Jaws dropped so hard and fast they both nearly caused themselves a prolapse... a quick publicity shot with a vroom block bar, and we were back on track to bag Thirlmere, hitting the dam at 10:10.

I'd been able to see both Derwent water and Bassenthwaite, the whole descent of sticks pass, and now knew the end was insight, and that I had pretty much achieved what I had intended to do.

We headed on towards Keswick over frozen boggy fields, followed by a long road section, it was just before heading off through the fields from the Keswick road, that mark told us to go on without him, he was starting to struggle and felt like he was going to slow me down, this was a little hard, I'm very much a believer that we all have to finish together, whether it's my round or not, but he insisted, so me and Sean headed on, just moments later seans phone died, and we couldn't use the GPS file or map, (again bloody technology) so there we were running down the road, "are you local?" til one woman finally said yes, and I was like "I'm over 80miles into a winter record attempt on a 100mile challenge, crow Park by the fastest route" she told us and we sped off, thankfully Keswick council have the brains to grit the roads so was able to up the gears to hit derwentwater at 11:40, a quick removal of one of the 3 thermal tops and 2 pairs of tights, a good lashing of vaseline over the now chafed chaff, and the collection of returning pacers Adam and Amy, and we were heading on to the second to last Lake, Bassenthwaite, as expected nearly 30hrs on the go, I was a bit tired and had a bit of hallucinations going on, even at one point asking Adam what his tattoos ment... he replied "I havnt got an tattoos, what dya mean?" it turns out in was just mud on his calf... (what a dickhead) I was sure I could see incomplete tattoos, it must've been all that sugar and caffeine.

So hallucinations coming and going, we were running then walking, walking then running, keeping moving at all times, til I was able to dip me toes at bassenthwaite at 13:29, just one to go!

Sore, stiff and tired I pressed on, with the support and wit of Adam, Sean and Amy, and just short of 5 miles later I opened up, and gave everything I had left and a bit more to hurtle full sprint across the field to hit the shores of overwater at 14:50, Challenge Complete.

The whole experience has been absolutely amazing, and I can not express my thanks and love to my whole crew, road support and pacers alike, you all went all out to get me this winter record, and I could never thank you enough.

Achille ratti, you have a wonderful, somewhat monstrous challenge, and I sincerely hope the attention around this will rise, this deserves to be on the map.