

## The 26 Lake, Meres and Waters

I was first introduced to this challenge in 2017 by Tony Marlow who was planning an attempt. For the next 20 months, I joined Tony on recces and subsequently navigated 2 legs on his successful attempt in June 2019. He completed it in Leo Pollard's memory, the first completer. I became immersed in the route and found myself excited to give it a try myself.

So, early 2020, I set a date and had a full team ready to support me. Unfortunately, Covid-19 hit us and training from home became the new challenge! My official date came and went amidst thunderstorms, so it was quite a relief that I was unable to start.

Thankfully, travel restrictions were lifted and I spent every opportunity getting lots of climbing and reccing in. I tested my fitness on a rescheduled LM40 and ran my perfect race finishing 1st Lady, despite the soaring heat. My legs recovered quickly and with less than 10 days to go, I gathered my team.

5:30am, Saturday 29th August 2020, I woke up in my car at Braithwaite. I wanted to recreate the events that led to my successful race only 2 weeks before. Two boiled eggs, porridge and coffee. I made my way to the Illingworths where my leg 1 man, John Thompson was waiting and we headed down to the start, with a minor detour...

At 07:13am, Steph and Guy waved us off from Loweswater. The trot along the shore of Crummock Water was surreal. Finding my pace and the realisation of what I'd started! We soon arrived at Buttermere where Chris Usher greeted us having offered his support only the day before! I felt really positive climbing Red Pike recalling the foul conditions of the reccé and the contrast of today's weather. Before long, we were descending to Ennerdale. I felt so relaxed with the chatter and laughter, I almost forgot what I was here for! The climb out of the valley was a real pleasure, it made reaching the top arrive in no time. We traversed to Pots of Ashness where Chris left us. John and I continued our descent to Greendale where a small crowd ringing cowbells awaited. Tony welcomed me with a hot cuppa and some food after forfeiting running to do the entire road support! The glue that held the entire weekend together!

Before I got too comfortable, I was sent on my way with fellow Lostock AC member Chris Taylor leading us out of Greendale. Comedy duo Andy Ford and Paul Swindles kept me entertained as we headed off to touch Wastwater. From here to Devoke Water, it was a magical mystery tour. The only section I hadn't recced. The mixed terrain was dominated by wild fell and bogs on the climb out of Eskdale. Sharing my rendition of 'We're going on a Bear Hunt' seemed most appropriate here until we reached Devoke Water. Several tussocks later, we stood on Green Crag taking in the amazing views and tightening our laces for the soft, wet descent. I loved the spongy terrain so I stretched out adding some pace as I finished the leg.

The Coniston Leg started with a long slog up Walna Scar Road out of Seathwaite. The wind had picked up and but nothing could stop the banter with clubmates Adrian Hope and Mark Shuttleworth. The rocky traverse to Goatswater was exciting and I was enjoying the new terrain. There was reminiscing of Tony's attempt which they'd both supported. The last stiff

climb of the leg was followed by such a fun descent to Low Water. I took the lead on the unnerving traverse to Levers Water before hot footing to Coniston Water.

From Coniston, Mark Sammon, Rachel Hancock and Sam Sale led me to Esthwaite under the setting sun. As darkness fell, the waxing gibbous moon seemed to follow us and the bats hovered above. We made swift progress to Elterwater along the country lanes. It was nice to be in a rhythm and add a bit of pace. On the final climb before Grasmere, we had a singalong though it felt like I was dreaming. After Grasmere and Rydal Water, I was on the home straight for Windermere. 4km of pretty flat road running. I went into a meditative state at times where my legs were on autopilot going faster and faster. Without realising, I knocked 1.5hours off my schedule.

I left Ambleside with Paul Taylor and Peter McNulty. As we looked down at the moon reflecting on Windermere, the tiredness was creeping in along with stomach cramps. My poor eyesight made the descent into Kentmere down the Garburn pass painfully slow. We thankfully arrived at Skeggles Water which is much easier to find by day! The long trudge up to Gatesgarth Pass was eerily quiet but for the sound of foxes fighting. We descended to Haweswater with Tony, who had come up to meet us. I felt drained and got cold really quickly. Tony suggested a powernap so I shut my eyes! Waking to daylight 20mins later felt so strange! It felt like 2 hours! A quick coffee and I was on my way up to Small Water and Blea Water, the hidden gems. With the sunrise came heat to warm me up and get me moving well again. After touching Hayeswater, I was glad to be descending to the end of the leg after what felt like a long night.

Arriving at Hartsop was quite emotional. I was met by Leo's daughter Diane, Rob Green Snr and Jnr. and a surprise guest appearance from Maria, Honor and Becki! Cue happy tears! My spirit was well and truly lifted and ready to go! Rob Snr set a good pace to Brotherswater and there was no easing all the way to Ullswater. The climb up to Swart Bridge required a couple of sit downs and a few sweets but by Sticks Pass I was recharged. Rob Jnr led the speedy descent to Stanah where I'd taken another hour off my schedule.

Sat in a layby for the changeover, I was totally overwhelmed by the people that had come to show their support including fell running photographer Stephen Wilson who caught every smile! I had to tear myself away from the party atmosphere and set off on the final leg, first stop Thirlmere. Alison Wainwright stepped up to navigate me to Derwentwater with Rob Jnr and Tori Miller was a surprise addition on route. Rob left us at Keswick but we welcomed Steph who led us to the only Lake, Bassenthwaite where Tony met us. The only thing between us and the finish at Overwater was 6 miles/1000ft! I had so many mixed feelings on this uphill journey. I wanted it to be over so I could stop running, but at the same time I didn't want it to end because I'd had such an amazing time. I had tunnel vision as I ran towards the small crowd of friends cheering. That last 100m to the water had me choked up. I calmly touched the water. That's it! The most amazing weekend and now it's over! It took a moment to sink in before I could celebrate. I did it! 103mi/23,000ft in 33hours 39mins and new ladies record. Only made possible by great friends. Thank you!