

Mhairi Helme's Lakes, Meres and Waters report.

We started at 5:47am at Loweswater side, by the road, rather than the normal recommended point, because we were attempting to follow Joss Naylor's route as closely as possible.

It was very hot already! We went steady on to Crummock and Buttermere, and started to climb up Red Pike. As a runner, the plan had been to run the route. Unfortunately, a knee injury from a fall a couple of weeks earlier, (which I had hoped had repaired with rest) became painful to run on by the time I reached Bleaberry Tarn and I had to make a decision whether to stop, or to carry on and walk the route. I'm a reasonably paced walker, so I decided to carry on and walk it as fast as I could.

Steve Jaques paced me from Loweswater to Wasdale. The heat was increasing already along Ennerdale and by the climb up Haycock it felt like hard work!! In some ways, it seemed a blessing that my knee prevented me from running as the weather was not good for going fast! One thing about my knee was that my usual abilities were reversed, so uphill became easier than down, (which became really quite tricky due to the pain). Greendale was especially hard, as usually I love technical descents; we had made good time to the col of Haycock but lost it on the descent, which was very difficult going with my knee, so we arrived in Wasdale roughly on time.

Joss was there at Greendale Bridge to give us a few words of encouragement and we met Geoff Cox, my next pacer near the Youth Hostel.

The heat, once again turned up a notch and the next leg with Geoff to Devoke and over to Duddon was tough as there was little shelter from the Sun.

Selwyn Wright took over just by the Newfield Inn in Duddon Valley and we set off up Walna Scar. In a hugely gallant gesture, Selwyn very kindly gave me his socks as my feet were sweating profusely and blistering badly on the sole and I'd already used up all my clean/fresh pairs! Lucy Spain ran up from Coniston and met us at top of Walna Scar Road and came with us to the highest point on the Old Man before Selwyn and I continued to Low and then Levers Water as Lucy returned home.

We were more significantly behind schedule by this point, but all my pacers waited patiently. My husband and children provided road support at Coniston, by the Lake, and I was joined by Jenny Helme and Sabrina Verjee.

On to Hawkshead and Fi Marley Patterson was dropped off by our other road support Paul Cox. Jenny Helme and Sabrina paced me on to Skelwith before we said goodbye. Fi carried on with me to Elterater, Grasmere and Rydal and we met Jenny Rice on the Under Loughrigg Road. Jenny and Fi did a great job of leading me through a tough patch over Garburn Pass and by the time we arrived in Kentmere I was starting to feel better.

We met Paul Simpson, Lauren Munro Bennett and Sarah McCormack by the institute in Kentmere and I briefly stopped to change my socks as I could feel the whole front of my soles blistering and was desperately trying to prevent this getting worse.

The relative cool of the night was helpful and we made good progress to Skegges and Kentmere. The climb to Nam Bield looked huge but soon passed and then we were met by a beautiful sunrise at Small Water.

I felt slightly disappointed by how far the water had receded at Haweswater!! It was about 200m further to walk than when I'd reced the route about 6 weeks earlier!

The path up to Bleaswater was uneventful and I dug in for the last big climb of the leg up High Street. My knee was pretty painful on the steep rocky ground and the descent past Riggindale was frustrating to walk as it's runnable ground and so lovely to fly down at speed! But we were soon descending to Hayeswater and the morning heat was already extreme. We had a short stop at Hayes, where John met us and some folks were desperate for a swim!

We met Rob Green, now my only pacer for the next section, at Hartsop. My other pacer had emailed the day before to apologise that he could no longer help.

The shaded path to Brotherswater gave some relief from the sun, it was incredibly hot for being so early and I started to look to Sticks Pass with some trepidation.

The route between Brotherswater and Glenridding seemed very far in the heat and with only one being able to walk. But Rob kept my spirits up and gave me some Coke which was like gold!!

When we got to Sticks pass, it felt fine and the climb was soon over. The weather blessed me, unbelievable with dark brooding clouds on the steep portion of the climb, that shaded us from the worst of the sun. They disappeared as we neared the top, it really was like some sort of serendipitous magic! We were met on top by Pete Todhunter, a lovely surprise. The last descent to Thirlmere was happy, as I felt sure if I could get this far that I would make it to the finish!

I was met by Helen Dudley for this leg up to Keswick. I noted green blue algae on Thirlmere, the only time we saw it those two days. The route by the road was a bit of a shock after such beautiful scenery till now. But we soon broke off left to head to Derwent Water. I was met by my husband, John and my children, Annie and Isaac and also Jen and Carl Bell and baby Elsie. Even my children found it too hot on the short section they joined me for! It seemed surprisingly far to Derwentwater from the road!

Sabrina Verjee came back to Keswick to pace me to the end alongside Naomi Jaques who met us about a mile from Bassenthwaite with ice cream! Helen left where we hit the road.

Pete and Gill Todhunter met me at Bassenthwaite and I allowed myself a "dip" though I found it harder to get back up than I'd realised!!

We reached the road to Overwater and the end seemed very close, however that last four miles was the hardest of the whole route. I now know that I was a bit unwell having overhydrated. Sabrina and Naomi were awesome and my husband came and met us shortly after the turnoff.

And, finally, Joss was waiting on the road to meet me and walk the last section which was just incredibly special and it was fantastic to see my family, Mum In Law and Pete, Gill, Steve and Naomi and Steve's kids at the end. My children were so proud, having been involved in support along the route and seeing how far I'd come. I am so very glad that they got to witness the generosity and kindness of our community and the amazing support so freely given. The specialness of the day for me came from the utterly beautiful places we passed through and from the people who