

## Lakes, Meres and Waters Challenge

May 28<sup>th</sup>/29<sup>th</sup> 2022

### David Ralphs and Katherine Sutton

What a weekend, what an adventure.

Loweswater had no signs of the forecast foggy start just before our 7am start when we were met by Rob and Diane Green. The o'clock came and we were on our way with our 2 trusty support runners, Jim Maxfield and John Vaughan. Nice and steady to Crummock and then onto Buttermere, 3 down and barely a person in sight. More of this to come we hoped. As we approached the steps to Red Pike we were met by an endless torrent of race runners also heading up the same path. The steps began to rise as did the temperature, luckily even without the forecast breeze conditions were still pleasant (unless you had gone with too many layers and a woolly hat like JV but that's another story). The race runners peeled off short of the summit and we continued on what was signposted as the 10k race route. Up and over, down into Ennerdale and onto Ennerdale Water. and a return to solace Up and over across the boulders luckily a good line was easier to pick this time than our recce in early January at dusk in freezing temperatures, all good fun though. Down into Greendale where Kayleigh Ralphs was waiting for us with corned beef hash.

Jim carried on with us for Leg 2 and we were joined by John Thompson and Guy Illingworth who successfully completed their Lakes Meres Waters Challenge last July. On to Wastwater, Devoke next. A planned refill of water at Devoke, Kayleigh again with provisions, Jim retired for the day having been on the road or hill since the early hours having driven up that morning. The journey passed quickly as it had before Devoke with John and Guy's continuing chatter a lot of it around how heavy their bags were. Planned drinks stop at The Newfield a coke and soda went down nicely before the very warm pull up the Walna Scar, Coniston was almost in sight. With Goats Water ticked off we were making good time and behind the scenes between the continuing comments about how heavy the bags were I think there may have been some checking up to make sure our checkpoint would be ready. Around Brim Fell and the preferred grassy descent to Low Water, Levers Water was soon reached and the final descent into Coniston for Soup.

At Coniston we were greeted by our checkpoint host Steph, soup and brews on the go all went down a treat. Julie and Matt Lavery and Chris Usher ready to take over, we prepared for the impending close of daylight. Into Hawkshead the mood in the group was buoyant and as live music spilled out of a pub an impromptu drinks stop was organised another coke and hot water went down well on the way back from Esthwaite. The chatter was chirpy as Elterwater, Grasmere and Rydal came and went it was now dark. The streets of Ambleside were empty as we made good progress to our next checkpoint "Chez Richard".

Richard, Fred and Wally were ready and waiting for the off but first a brew and some pasta to set us up for the long nightshift. With Windermere behind us the night air was cooler as we climbed before the cobbly descent to Kentmere. Into Kentmere and the pace hastened as the schedule was checked and read by the spectacle-less eyes of Fred we had lost quite some time. Over to Skeggles daylight was not quite breaking. When we had reced this section in late December, Skeggles was bathed in beautiful sunset light and moonrise, such a gift to now see it in the very earliest of halflight. The schedule was duly checked and with some discussions it was clear this time the right columns and numbers were pointed and read out we were well back on track more ahead of schedule than before.

Over to Sadgill, for a quick pitstop, Chris and Mike Pittaway very kindly agreed to do this for us, we thought a welcome break on the nightshift and it was especially when they appeared with blankets while we downed our brews and custard and off we were again, me with takeaway porridge in hand. The long climb up Gatesgarth passed and another cobbly descent to Haweswater these cobbly descents were now starting to take their toll on our feet.

Haweswater was rich in water so a short trot to the waters edge ticked it off swiftly. Still with support from Richard, Fred and Wally we ticked off Small Water and Blea Water up to High Street then nice and steady to Hayeswater, where Chris Usher (from Leg 3) was just packing up his tent. We were ahead of schedule so there was a bit of concern if our next checkpoint would be there as they were travelling up that morning, no fear we could smell the bacon before we could see it.

Alan and Emily on the Sutton's checkpoint at Hartsop was a welcome site, Dave had hardly eaten since Ambleside but managed to put 2 bacon and egg butties away. It was now definitely Sunday morning.

Preparations for Leg 4 and the day ahead were made including some foot tlc and a change of support crew to Chris and Mike Pittaway (Sadgill pitstop) and Debbie and Martin and their dog. Brothers Water touched then just ticked along nicely to Glenridding and Ullswater ready to start the "last climb" Sticks Pass. It was getting quite warm now unlike our recce day in November which was calf deep in snow all the way with skiers making the most of the fresh snow. Steady away we reached the top, time for a little pause and reflection this was the "last climb" after all. Down the fellside to the next checkpoint, Sutton's were waiting with soup and refreshments.

Some much needed foot prep, food and water we were set up for Leg 5, the home stretch. Kayleigh and Emily now taking over as support crew, Dad and daughter and Mum and daughter pairings. Thirlmere came and went, some track, road, field and path made up a very pleasant journey towards Keswick and Derwent Water. A comfort break with a too close for comfort encounter with an ants nest and a nearly misnavigation the only things to note. Keswick was bustling as we touched Derwent, just 2 to go now. Through Keswick we heard voices calling Dave... Kathy....luckily it wasn't our imagination but Nick and his family who had been determined to track us down a quick rendezvous and Portinscale here we come.

Pitstop Portinscale, Suttons providing again and another surprise visit from Rob Green. Steph (Coniston checkpoint) swapped in for Emily as support runner. We chose the pleasant paths across the fields as far as we could as further along the route the road is the only choice. Onto the very fast (that's the vehicles) A591. A few vehicles too close for comfort and some giant brambles breaking up the torment of the tarmac. Dodd Wood car park signalled the start of the track down to our penultimate stop. Bassenthwaite looked picture perfect, up past the Chapel and back to the A591 but not for long as we turned off along a narrow country lane.

Having only recced this section by car and not on foot, as it was the one part we were least looking forward to it was hard to transfer car miles into on foot miles. Traffic was very light and the road twists and turns rises and falls, all much pleasanter than we had imagined. As we passed half familiar landmarks, buildings, houses Overwater must be getting closer but the road was still not levelling out...maybe around the next corner. A little win came in the form of overtaking 2 people out for a stroll. The 100 mile mark was reached and we were joined by John (Leg 1) and Guy (Leg 2). We chatted away the last mile or so and finally reached the crossroads our journey was almost at its end. Kayleigh, Steph and Co ran ahead leaving us to our many thoughts, relief, happiness, joy, allsorts and a tinge of sadness but all good things as they say. After 102.3 miles Overwater was reached, the end of our Lakes, Meres and Waters Challenge. What an adventure!