

Lakes Meres and Waters Report

Megan James – 29th – 30th June 2024

Total Completion time: 34 hours, 51 minutes

Tracking link: <https://live.kongtracking.com/MLMW24/>

I was first introduced to the Lakes Meres and Waters route back a few years back having moved up to the Lake District and joined Achille Ratti as a mountaineering club following a recommendation from my good friend Fiona (leg 1 support runner). I distinctly remember a number of nights alone visiting the Wasdale hut having had adventures on the hills, and sitting down to read the copy of Lakes, Meres and waters that lives at the hut and I guess over time the idea took hold that I might one day have an attempt and see what this epic looking route really looked like. With this in the back of my mind I started a year or so ago using the route for some longer training runs, and to recce the route for “if” I did ever decide to do it. Having had other big running goals for the last few years I didn’t really give the route much focus. But at the end of last year my desire to “adventure” rather than race took over, and the idea of actually going for an attempt took hold and wouldn’t let go – something that I could do my own way, at my own speed, and more in the spirit of exploring a big route on the hills, rather than chasing down a time was very appealing.

I’d originally had September in mind for an attempt, but following a good period of longer adventures earlier in the year I wanted to put the miles on my legs to good use and found 1 date in June that provided a gap in the fell racing calendar and would work from a personal perspective. Most importantly I wanted to squeeze it in whilst my partner Scott Morley still there to share the fun and support me before going off on his own adventure.

So 29-30 June it was - with some messages back and forth with Rob and Diane, I finally rummaged up a support crew with about 2 weeks notice and put some plans in place. My support team was mainly made up of my running club, Eden Runners, with some additions from my wider ultra distance friends I’d raced with in the past. My plan was to be as self-sufficient as I could, whilst still having support runners, keeping things as simple as possible. Its just a big adventure on hills with friends right?

Leg 1 – Loweswater to Eskdale Green

Support Crew – Fiona Lynch & Stuart Russell (Achille Ratti & Calder Valley)

Right from the beginning there was no way I was going to have this adventure without my long term partner in adventure Fiona – since meeting through the Dragons back race a number of years ago, we spent countless days on the hills together, chatting away and have become good friends. Through Fiona I met Stu and the two made a brilliant team – plus I got to start kick everything off with 2 Ratti members which only seemed fitting.

Having met up in Eskdale the night before, Scott dropped us at Loweswater ready for the 8am set-off. As the count down to the 8am start ticked away the long walk Achille Ratti group, led by Rob and Diane, turned up to see us off – lots of brief hugs and nervous excitement, and then we were off! To have a crowd of about 30 people turn up at the start was a really special start of the whole adventure.



At this point a secondary challenge was born – lakes meres and waters body part twister, in which support runners got to pick which body part I touch each water with. I had some fun trying to touch buttermere with my nose, with elbows, calves and feet to follow.

I'd plotted leg1 to go all the way to Eskdale given I had good long distance runners with me and it meant I could cut out a changeover point. I also after much deliberation decided on the route over haycock (rather than black sail) meaning we had less of trudge back up ennerdale valley and could drop straight into the end of wasdale where I was more familiar with the connecting trails, having explored them from the hut a number of times. The weather gods were kind in that the baking heat from earlier in the week had gone, but was replaced for thick clag the entire day, giving us mizzle and little visibility over the peaks. We did however make good progress, getting into Eskdale only about 20 minutes behind my very guessed schedule.

Leg 2 – Eskdale to Coniston

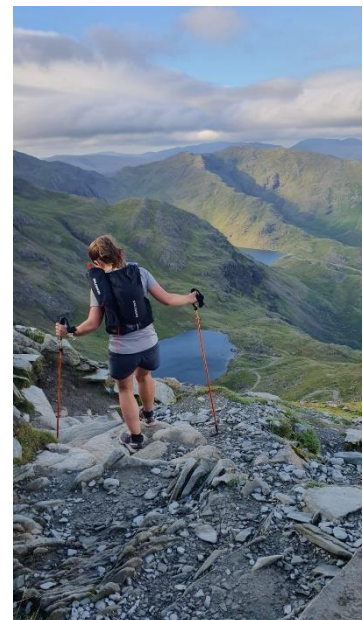
Support Crew: Scott Morley & Dave Baglee (Eden Runners)

Arriving in Eskdale we were met by both Scott and Dave, kindly shuffled by Dave's wife Alison who was an essential support in logistics for the first few legs. I'd packed a small box of supplies, changed my socks and tried to head out as quickly as possible.

Whilst Scott was my main support for the whole round, we always wanted to run a section together. I was keen that Scott join me on the section to Coniston as one of the more tricky fell sections and as we'd run quite a bit through Eskdale, Devoke and Duddon together before. I'd also supported Dave a few weeks before on his own Bob Graham attempt and he was keen to come out and be part of the adventure – and so I had a great team of 2 for the long leg to Coniston.

I was still moving well, although the road sections that connect both Eskdale and devoke and devoke to Coniston seemed to go on forever (especially as I was still in fell shoes knowing that I'd want them for the more technical sections around Coniston). It was great to be out on the hills with both Scott and Dave, easily chatting away, especially now realizing that the whole route was new for Dave. I love the fact that many of the support runners throughout commented that they had never been to these part of the lake district and it added to the spirit of adventure as we worked our way along.

I'd recced the Coniston section a few weeks earlier and noted some possible short cuts from my GPS trace (but not had time to test them). As the clag finally lifted on top of Coniston old man, we could see the short cut line between low water and levers water and took a chance which paid off, making up some time and heading into Coniston just as the chippy closed (massive thanks to leg 3 runners ben and Jamie at this point for getting us all big bags of salty chips which were just what was needed!).



Leg 3 – Consiton to Troutbeck

Support Runners: Jamie Partridge, Ben Grayson & Bobby Gard-Story (Eden Runners)



Fueled on by possibly too many chips and a short picnic in Coniston monk carpark, I head out with Ben and Jamie onto Leg 3. Both good friends from Eden and brilliant fun loving folk who chatted away to me making me laugh and smile the whole way around. Never ones to take things too seriously, this was just the pick-up I needed heading into the night section – making up lake meres and waters poems as we went and generally enjoying what was now a

beautiful evening with views across to Kentmere and loughrigg.

Clearly all the positive energy helped and we managed to catch back nearly an hours worth of time on this leg, surprising the team by coming into windermere quicker than expected. The running was good, my legs were still moving and it was glorious night.

At windermere, Jamie and Ben handed me over to the Bobby, who had got up in the middle of the night and done an out and back from his home in troutbeck to take me onwards from Windermere to my leg 4 support runners. Always one for a jam packed weekend, this was his night shift squeezed in between marshalling great lakes on the Saturday and racing wansfell and baystones on the Sunday!

Leg 4 – Troutbeck to Hartsop

Support Runners: Jon Tombs (Eden Runners) and Chris Smallman (Mercia Fell Runners) + Jess the dog

At Troutbeck I arrived glad to see that Chris had made the long journey up from Malvern and was ready and waiting with Jon (our fell captain for Eden) and the lively Jess to take me onwards on leg 4. Chris and I have raced many times together and I've also supported up on his own rounds and I was delighted him and his partner Sarah were able to make it up. Along with Jon and his experience I knew I had a trusted team that could safely support me through one of the harder night sections.

I knew this would be a long leg, and I spent some time refueling and preparing myself for probably the hardest leg of the route. On reflection, even knowing this I massively under estimated it with what I realized later was a much too tight schedule and it took a good few hours longer than planned. I also included Kentmere in this leg, with it being in Joss's round, and as it felt more complete for me to include it. That meant my route was mainly configured to go over nan bield pass to tick Kentmere en route.



Hitting high street and with the last of the big climbs done for this leg (of which there seemed many), we were back on Jon's home turf and he led us on some brilliant lines down to hayeswater and onwards to hartsop. Doggie support runner jess had a brilliant night adventure too, although I

suspect she was very confused as to why I was touching each water and not getting in and playing with her (sorry Jess!).

Leg 5 – Hartsop to Keswick

Support Runners: Sam Braithwaite and Mark Pannone (Eden Runners)



Arriving in Hartsop, a nights worth of running was starting to take it's toll. Not only was I starting to fall asleep on my feet but I was struggling with energy and sore feet. However I was still running as much as I could, all be it slower and slower. There was a great crowd there to welcome me into hartsop and that lifted my spirits, where I would meet with Mark and Sam, both good friends from Eden to get me up and over sticks pass and along to Keswick.

Having been on Bob graham support the other week with Sam, I had warned him I'd be slow, and slow I was. However both Sam and Mark did their best to keep me moving as I started having micro naps on the way up sticks pass, keeping me distracted with talk of music and desert island discs all the way up the climb and the descent.

Thirlmere seemed to take forever to come and then the road section to Keswick caused my one blister to suddenly burst, causing me to hobble down the wood section into the lakeside carpark and touch the water. Things were starting to get very painful (mainly my feet) and I had to take good stop at Keswick to try and patch myself up as much as possible. Only one leg to go... how painful could it be?

Leg 6 – Keswick to Over Water

Support Runners: Katie Warlock & Rebecca Illingworth (Eden Runners) + Bracken the dog

I was super excited to meet the girls at Keswick who would take me all the way to the finish. I knew I needed their friendship and hugs to keep me going, as well as Brackens waggy tail. Turning up with fresh pineapple which was game changer and smiles and chat, I gave Scott a big hug knowing the next time I'd see him was at the finish and set off with both Katie and Bex on the final stretch.



By this point it was very much a walk, jog, shuffle scenario – my feet were very sore and my stomach was not happy. I knew I was behind my arbitrary timing, but I still hoped I could do under 35 hours. I knew that this last stretch, although only 12 miles was going to drag with a lot of road and hard packed trail. Each mile seemed to go on forever. This was compounded by me plotting a slightly different route accidentally to what I had recced which upon following took us up the steepest slope ever in dodd wood and a lot of panicked scrambling up the steepest path on all fours. Bracken the dog loved it, we did not...



I've never been so glad to see a stretch of water, than I was when over water came into sight. I believe I mumbled something like "well that was a long way" to which I got the response "yes meg" before a big giggle and sigh of relief that we were almost there. I managed to run the last final stretch to over water where I was surprised greeted by my good friend and Ratti member Louisa Rodriguez who had come to cheer me into the finish, along with Scott. Big hugs, a touch of the water and I was done (followed by a carry back to the car...)

I can't thank all that came out to support me enough – you are all wonderful people and I hope you enjoyed the adventure as well.

The news of Joss's passing that very weekend feels poignant to be finishing a round of which he still holds the record. I'd like to think, although I never had the honour to meet him, he would have seen the spirit of fell running and friendship in abundance, which is really what it is all about.