

Libbi's Lake, Meres & Waters attempt: 8th - 9th December 2024

Finish time: 29 hours 1 minute 27 seconds

<https://live.opentracking.co.uk/llmw2024/>

I have been daydreaming about taking on Lake, Meres & Waters for a few years - ever since relocating to the Lake District and getting my hands on Joss's book - but somehow could never quite fit it in around other things through the spring and summer months. From a trail running background, I knew I needed to give the challenge the time it deserved, all the rough ground and potential route choices required care, attention and experience. After a long time spent poring over maps and GPX files, I was getting eager to put a date in the diary. "What about a winter attempt instead?", I suggested to my partner Nathan. The route lends itself to winter conditions with relatively short periods of time spent up high. Daylight hours and weather would be potential issues but in the Lake District you can have terrible weather at any time of the year! The seed was sown and shortly after I

was putting out messages to friends and family about joining me as support on route. I was overwhelmed with people wanting to join me on my adventure, especially from my run club pals at Black Combe - I should have known then it was going to be a great day! The kindness and generosity of the fell running community never ceases to amaze me.

I picked the 7 - 8th of December with it being the first official weekend for a recognised winter attempt, meaning if needed, I had time to reschedule for early 2025. After many fun weekends out doing recces and evenings spent perfecting the logistics that come with these kinds of selfpropelled challenges, my date was drawing near. I was struggling to pull together a schedule for the attempt, as I felt there were so many variable factors in winter that could impact my time. I felt sub30 hours could be achievable for me on paper over 100 miles, but I didn't want to put pressure on myself when my main goal was to get round and have an adventure-filled day with friends. I pitched the sub 30 schedule to my crew and pacers as a 'best case scenario', more to help with timings of when people needed to meet at each leg. Just as we were gearing up to go, we got thrown a curve ball as the met office announced yellow, amber and red weather alerts across the country from Storm Darragh - perfect timing! Eager not to push to a later weekend, we mapped out what would be possible and pushing my start time 24 hours seemed like the best and safest solution, meaning I would now set off at 8am on Sunday the 8th December. As you can imagine, this impacted my carefully curated pacer plan as most people had places to be by Monday morning. It took some lastminute admin but we got there and after sitting watching the storm batter our windows on Saturday, we knew we'd made the right choice to postpone.

The wind howled as my alarm sounded at 4:30am. I frantically refreshed the weather app again to confirm the winds were indeed still due to calm down significantly throughout the course of the day. I ate my porridge and drank tea in bed, feeling that nervous, excited feeling in my stomach, I was really doing this! We picked up my leg 1 pacers, Kevin Brooks and Robbie Driscoll and had a cosy ride in the van - dog included - to the car park on the tip of Loweswater. The sky lightened as we walked to the shore and we huddled by a tree to keep warm waiting for the clock to turn 8.

The grassy trails over to Crummock Water were easy going and we found a comfy pace chatting about Christmas plans and admiring the snow-capped mountain tops that surrounded us. The

weather wasn't anywhere near as bad as expected and we soon hit Crummock, my second Water visited! We were joined by Sabrina Verjee at the base of Sourmilk Gill and I stepped down to touch Buttermere, before starting the climb up Red Pike. We were moving at a steady pace and the chatter passed the time before the winds picked up around 100m from the summit. We pushed on, keen to get up and over the other side to drop out of the gusts, the tailwind nearly blowing me into Sabs as we descended towards Ennerdale. I enjoyed a supernatural fuel before the out and back to touch the shores of Ennerdale, quickly returning to head into the forest before climbing again towards Haycock. The ground was boggy, frozen and rough as we traversed around the fell, staying out of the high winds for as long as possible. Up and over the pass, we enjoyed the long descent through the valley towards Wasdale and Wast Water. I spotted Ava's yellow van from the fell and after a short section of road we reached Nathan, who was ready and waiting with hot tea. I said goodbye to Kev and Robbie and Sabs and I was joined by Beth Ripper and Ava Grossman, along with Pip and Moss the dogs. I hadn't managed to recce Wasdale to Eskdale Green but the ladies are locals, and I felt in safe hands following their footsteps through the Miterdale Forest. They kept me fed and watered and as we reached Eskdale Green, Beth and Pip traded places with the rest of the Ripper clan; Tim, Mae and Molly (the collies!). Ava also had to leave shortly after for a mountain rescue call out.

The tarmac incline up to Devoke Water was a bit tiresome but we plodded on and were joined by more Black Combers, Nick Selby and Jono the dog. We turned right onto the track to hit Devoke Water before taking the line over to pick up another track down to Woodend farm. The upcoming 'Snack Shack' was hot topic of conversation as we got our heads down on the long tarmac stretch towards Seathwaite. Tim and Sabs were disappointed to find the eagerly awaited snack box was empty, so we picked up the pace to get to my parent's van at the Newfield Inn, where I knew they were waiting with homemade mince pies and more tea. Nick knew a short cut, so we followed him through some farm fields to get off the road. Not sure if it was quicker, but it helped boost morale and we were soon approaching the Newfield - bang on my sub 30-hour schedule.

Mince pies scoffed, we said goodbye to Sabrina and set off up the familiar ground of the Walna Scar road. Sue Ross and Loki joined for a few miles - we were on the verge of being outnumbered by dogs! They provided some entertainment as we snaked up towards Brown Pike. The light was starting to fade now and the wind and rain had really picked up, I pushed on with Tim and when we turned around, we realised we were way ahead of the others. Matthew Allen met us at the top of Walna to take over for the Coniston section and I stopped to get my head torch out. With Coniston being home turf, I'd decided early on that I'd try and take all of Joss's lines through these fells. It was just

Matthew and I now and as we reached the corner to drop towards Blind Tarn, we almost got knocked over by the strength of the wind. I pulled my hood up as we staggered down and tried to find the line across to Goat's Water. We'd lost all light now and it was proving difficult to study the ground as the wind rattled us from side to side. We eventually found a trod and managed to follow it down to touch Goat's Water. The wind was so strong, I suggested we might need to find a lower level route around the Old Man, rather than going up and over. Matthew thought it would be ok so long as we stayed together and kept moving up. Off we went, hands-on-fell clambering up the side of the Old Man of Coniston occasionally getting blown off our feet, the wind taking my breath away as I pushed up towards the summit. The wind didn't let up as we swiftly tried to get down the tourist track to Low Water. This is where the fun really started. We followed the water's edge to locate the line over to Levers Water, which we often took as part of Black Combe social runs but

somehow in the dark and cold it was impossible to find. We ended up doing some dancing around the crags and eventually decided to drop down lower to safer ground. It wasn't worth one of us being injured! We hit Levers Water 15 minutes or so behind the schedule, before enjoying being on safer ground down into Monk Coniston. I hadn't eaten or drank much on that section with the weather conditions, so was looking forward to meeting the crew van for a much needed fuel top up. Note to anyone thinking of using my GPX file for this section; please don't!

I touched Coniston Water just before the car park and enjoyed some pizza, coffee and a quick sock change before setting off with my new all-girl team; Emma Seery, Eleanor Claringbold and my Mum! Karen Moorhouse. The ladies were amazing and with some good runnable trails ahead, I was looking forward to this section and it was so lovely to run with my Mum, who's always inspired me to take on these big challenges through her own impressive endeavors. We made really good progress over to Hawkshead and took the muddy out and back down to Esthwaite Water. The crew were at Skelwith and waved us past, as we followed the Lakeland route towards Elterwater. Quick touch of the water, we turned onto the road, before taking a right turn towards Grasmere. I had felt a little nauseous earlier after taking on a gel, but that quickly subsided, and I felt like we were ticking the waters off well. Grasmere and Rydal visited, we had a few miles of uneventful road into Windermere and I arrived into Waterhead car park back up on my schedule. I visited Windermere before another pizza slice and tea in the van. I pulled on some warmer layers as it was around 10:30pm now and I knew we had a big section to tackle through the night. Due to the last minute schedule change, I was fairly light on the ground crew wise on these final legs. My awesome coach and friend, Paul Tierney stepped in last minute to join me over to Hartsop and we set off into the night towards Troutbeck. We chatted away, Paul keeping me amused as we headed up the Garburn Pass. My uphill pace had slowed now, so I was using my poles to try and keep a steady rhythm. We hit Kentmere, snacking on some Rice Krispie Squares before running towards my least favourite water of the challenge; Skeggles.

For those who aren't familiar with the delights of Skeggles Water, my recommendation would be to stay that way, you aren't missing out! We traversed the tussocks to hit the water without too many problems, before wading through the bogs to reach a wall on the other side. We both fell in numerous times and I was very grateful for my waterproof socks. Paul seemed thrilled to be spending his Sunday night out here. Following a trod down to join the Lakeland route, we tried to make up some ground on the long slog over to Kentmere Reservoir. We hit the Reservoir (bonus water number 27, thanks Joss), before a steep climb out of the valley to join the higher path. This felt considerably harder than on the recce but we were soon dropping over to Small Water. The path down was technical in the dark and the drizzle had set in, so I felt like I was moving at snail pace through the wet rocks. Hitting the water on the other side, we crossed it and continued the downhill to Haweswater. This seemed to go on forever before a small out and back to reach the water. After some pretzels I felt a bit stronger on the climb back to Blea Water as the wind and rain set in. "It's not terrible weather, but it's f***king far from ideal conditions", Paul exclaimed as we scrambled up High Street. There was some snow and ice on the ground and I was happy to reach the top, knowing I only had one more climb left. The run down on the grass felt fairly fun after all rocky paths, but my knees were feeling the impact of nearly 80 miles of running. Reaching the crew at Hartsop we were ever so slightly behind schedule again but we took some time to warm up and change kit, before the heading out for the final stint.

I left Paul behind enjoying a hearty breakfast of mince pies and tea with my Mum, as Matthew and I

headed back out into the dark. By this point I was struggling to remember what daylight felt like, it had been dark for SO LONG... we quickly reached Brothers Water and pushed on to tick off the road miles over to Ullswater. I touched the water by the boat house and noticed the sky was finally starting to lighten. Passing my head torch to Matthew we ran / walked the climb to the bottom of Sticks Pass. I couldn't help but feel like Matthew had drawn the short straw with legs to support on after our earlier Coniston experience, as my ability to keep up the chat was waning. Matthew did a very good job of keeping up morale and we were treated to some beautiful early morning views over the Glenridding valley. I felt relief wash over me as we crested the top of the hill, knowing I was on the home straight. I felt I had been moving a lot slower on this leg and wasn't sure how I was tracking against my schedule, but for the first time I started to contemplate that sub 30 hours could be a possibility. I'm typically stronger on the 'runnable' stuff, so I knew there was a possibility for me to claw back some time on the upcoming road section - I just wasn't sure exactly how much time I was over by.

Nathan was by the van in Thirlmere and ran with us for a section up the main road. "How did I do time wise on that last section?" I asked, "Terrible", was his response... In hindsight, he knows how to make me dig a little deeper. We had allowed a 20 minute rest stop in Keswick, so if I ran straight through I would be back on track, leaving me just shy of 3 hours to reach Overwater. We dropped down some steps to reach the edge of Thirlmere before heading straight back up them and onto the road. Matthew helped me navigate the heavy flow of traffic up the dual carriageway towards Keswick as I forced down some jelly babies, grateful we were wearing our hi-vis vests. Down into Keswick I touched Derwent Water by the theatre, surrounded by a flock of geese. Waved Matthew off and Nathan ran alongside me as we quickly turned left at the roundabout and onto the busy A road towards Bassenthwaite Lake. Navigating the traffic, Nathan kept the pressure on as we made strides towards the Lake. The tarmac miles were taking their toll and I was happy to turn off down a lovely track to Bassenthwaite. Nathan's phone was pinging as we headed back to rejoin the main road and he read out some of the messages from all my friends dot watching my tracker at home. Feeling overwhelmed by everyone's encouragement in my sleep deprived state, I felt like I needed to get my head down and push on as much for their investment in this challenge, as my own! The road was long and undulating but I kept moving, Nathan playing music on his phone to give me some extra motivation. I remembered there being a farm just before Overwater on my recce but it seemed to never arrive. As I caught sight of the water I glanced at my watch and knew I had done it, just one more mile on the country lane to the far end of the water. My parents and Matthew had driven round to see me finish, I could see them waiting for me by the gate along with my Border Terrier Arthur. I ran through, touched Overwater and turned around and hugged my Mum!

I feel like I learned so much from taking on this amazing challenge and it's been a privilege to run alongside everyone who took their time out to help me achieve my goal - it wouldn't have been possible without them. Although I didn't know Joss personally, I think he inspired so many of us and it was an honour to complete the attempt this year in his memory. I by far exceeded my own expectations with Lake, Meres and Waters and it's left me believing in myself and my abilities a little more than before. It was definitely the adventure I was after!

PACERS: Kevin Brooks, Robbie Driscoll, Sabrina Verjee, Beth Ripper, Ava Grossman, Tim Ripper, Nick Selby, Sue Ross, Matthew Allen, Emma Seery, Eleanor Claringbold, Karen Moorhouse, Paul Tierney, Nathan French.

DOGS: Pip, Moss, Mae, Molly, Jono, Loki, Arthur.

CREW: Nathan French, Karen Moorhouse, John Moorhouse.





