

Lakes, Meres and Waters 21<sup>st</sup> December 2024 5am

“Sabrina, if you make it to Over Water I will be at the end to meet you.” Toddy shouted over the howling wind and lashing rain.

“Not if, when! Peter” I replied wondering to myself if he really thought there was a chance I might not make it. Then I looked around in the dark, my eyes waterlogged with rain like the fields and the hills surrounding Loweswater, yes I suppose it was going to be a tough day out there on this stormy winter solstice.



Photo credit: Peter Todhunter

Ben and I had driven over late last night after finishing work and parked the campervan in the little NT car park. We had had about 5 hours sleep and then begrudgingly dragged ourselves out of bed around 4am to make breakfast while listening to the rain thrashing down. Around 4.30am we could hear a couple of cars

pull up: my pacers for the first leg Jamie and Alex and Peter Todhunter (a close friend of Joss Naylor) sensibly wearing wellies.

So why on earth were we all here – the middle of nowhere?

30<sup>th</sup> January 2024 whatsapp text from Peter The old Fox Toddy

“Good to see you winning Arc and look forward to seeing what’s next on list. Maybe LMW ?? That would put a smile on Joss’ Face”



Photo credit: Ben Turner

Yes I think it would have put a smile on Joss’ face but I didn’t manage to get it done before 28<sup>th</sup> June 2024 when sadly Joss passed away. I kicked myself – I’d had ample opportunity since the day Joss gave me his book “Lakes, Meres and Waters of The Lake District” which he signed “Have a great life”. This was shortly after my 4<sup>th</sup> Wainwright’s attempt in June 2021 where Peter and Joss had made the effort to come and see me at Loweswater (towards the end of the 6 day round). However, the first time I met Joss was a year earlier at the Moot Hall in Keswick after completing the “It’s not a record” Wainwright round (if you want to know more on this and all the controversies you’ll have to read “Where there’s a hill”). Sometimes you meet

someone and you instantaneously have a connection – this is how I felt when I met Joss, we understood each other. So this round was run in dedication to “the King of the fells” may his memory live on and on in every Lake, Mere and Water.

Leg 1 Overwhelmed by rain, waterlogged paths and bog in the dark, a minor nav error by Crummock as we tried to escape the mud, fuelled well by Alex and Jamie – 4 x boiled baby potatoes, 1 x voom bar, 2 x tailwind flasks. Managed a solid pace up Red Pike but battered by the wind as we peaked, Alex and Jamie trying to shelter me from the wind but the gusts make descending slow and precarious – got caught by a quick arm from Jamie before a gust blew me off at one point! We were greeted at Ennerdale Water by Ben, Tim and the dogs – still dark, windy and wet but very happy. Tim (wearing shorts as usual) has brought Crosby Shack snacks – Cherry and Almond flapjack goes down a treat, lost the trod for a while and ended up floundering around heathery bog while progressing up Haycock but then found the ridge path and were over the summit style in good time. It’s a tricky, slippery descent and I hit the deck a couple of times caked in mud but it was raining so hard it all washed off!



Photo credit: Beth Ripper

Leg 2: Daylight at Wast Water



Photo credit: Dave Wood

The rain began to slow down, we arrive at Debs van – picked up snacks and a flask of tea.... No not tea... maybe hot milk that saw the tea bag for a second ....I was happy to meet the Ripper cheering squad on giggling alley as we pulled into Eskdale Green and deposited some tired, windswept, soggy dogs – they'd done well! We picked up Libbi who only 2 weeks before completed this very task claiming a new ladie's record which I had had the privilege of supporting her on. In fact this moment felt a bit "déjà vu" as it was the exact same team – Tim, Libbi and I who had gone to Devoke Water together on her challenge a fortnight ago.



Photo credit: Beth Ripper

Unexpected brightness on the darkest, shortest day of the year as we wind up the Birker Fell Road and the distant hum of a motorbike turns out to be Dave Wood who's come to take some photos.



Photo credit: Tim Ripper

I touched down at Devoke Water at 10:57 only 7 minutes down on my 25 hour schedule. I had managed to claw back the time I'd lost over windy Red Pike and Haycock – I was pleased as punch. Instead of trudging across the bog to the road I took Tim's advice and double backed along the hardpacked bridleway to rejoin the Birker Fell Road. It was a relatively easy trot into Seathwaite apart from the muddy, slippery shortcut across the Dunnerdale fields.

Libbi and Tim had been great company and kept me fuelled and now it was this super trio of Matt, Daz, Scott and the dogs to see me through the technical route across the Coniston Fells with the added challenge of gale force winds.



Photo credit: Matt Beresford

I would describe heading up Walna Scar as relatively pleasant, the rest of the leg to Coniston was somewhat more challenging but exhilarating. It's hard enough to stay upright in gale force winds on flat relatively stable ground, on slippery, rocky, uneven ground on the edge of crags is nigh on impossible – we all hit the deck at various points but always picked ourselves up laughing. We were treated by exceptional views and sights that were worthy of our efforts and I am very grateful to Matt who was able to capture a few of these so that I can share them here.



Photo credit: Matt Beresford "A rainbow over Goat Water"



Photo credit: Matt Beresford "The rain and wind on Coniston Fells"



Photo credit: Matt Beresford “Levers Water”

After quickly bagging Goat water, Low Water and Levers Water we were all happy to bomb it down to Coniston and even stopped in at the Black Bull for a quick two (well that’s what I’m going to call it.... One of my friend’s used to say he was “dropping the kids off at the swimming pool” and arrived at Deb’s van bang on schedule.



Photo credit: Hazel Clarke

Leg 4: You could call this leg boring, flat and full of road – it was anything but ... I had great company joined by La Sportiva team mate Gavin Dale and my favourite massage therapist soon to be physio Hazel Clarke. It was easy to keep the pace ticking along now that we were lower down and out of the worst of the weather. I was eating well being regularly fed bits of Voom bar, Supernatural pouches and French fries and drinking Tailwind. The sun set on us around Grasmere and we were treated to the pinky purple glow from the last of the light.



Photo credit Hazel Clarke "Sunset"

Around Rydal I started to feel it, my energy levels were waning a little and we were low on water so Gav called Debs and asked her to meet us at the Loughrigg Car

Park. My legs felt fine; I had just lost my appetite, but luckily Debs had brought me an amazing Pizza – what a team! I had been absolutely spoilt by everyone that had come out to help but Debs really knows how to take care of me. I took a slice and we were off running through the streets of Ambleside lit with Christmas lights. A quick dip of a toe at Waterhead where we were joined by Andy Ford and Emma Shawcross. We briefly stopped at Debs van again in Troutbeck and then carried on to Kentmere Church to meet Sharon.



Photo credit: Sharon Dyson “Eating cake in the van at Kentmere”

At Kentmere I was more or less on schedule but the hardest leg of the challenge was here – bogs of doom, lots of climbing, technical ground and for tonight darkness, lashing rain and strong winds.... It would be a fight. A fight that I needed to fuel for. I gratefully stuffed in some of Sharon’s amazing carrot cake that she baked especially for me and my team. I drank a bit of coke and ate a few crisps. It was not enough but it was better than nothing. Eating was hard. It was good there were a few of us on this tough leg.

Leg 5 Gav, Andy, Kev and Louise all suited and booted for the adventure. Somewhere in the bog we fell into Skegges and then crawled our way through the tussocks onto high ground. There’s a decent track on the right side of the wall and we were relatively sheltered from the wind. It felt like it took forever to get to Kentmere Reservoir though and I was worried that I didn’t have enough energy in me for the next tough climb. Still Nanbiel came and Small Water went and low and behold we found Tom McNally at Haweswater. This perked me up no end. I just thought about how incredible it was that someone was mad enough about

photography to come out here on his own lugging heavy equipment up on the fell in this stormy night.



Photo Credit: Tom McNally



Photo credit: Tom McNally



Photo credit: Kevin Robinson

I was pleased to reach Blea Water but I knew that we would be turning into a strong head wind which we did. My mountain savvy support team knew just what to do – they formed a wall in front of me taking the brunt of the wind. I tried to keep the calories going in but it was mainly bits of Voom bar that only worked for a few minutes. The descent down to Heyeswater was exciting and on reaching Hartsop I knew I'd broken the back of the challenge but it wasn't over. At this point I was only 20 minutes behind my schedule, it would have been a lot more had Gavin not been on this leg navigating so well in very difficult conditions.

I leapt into the van and Rachael gave my quads a good rub, Debs had made me some tortelloni pasta which I managed to eat slowly. I was taking my time knowing that if I didn't eat it was game over. My body generally felt okay, I was pretty happy I just didn't feel like eating. It was time to go – I left the comfort of the van and out into the wind and rain again “not far now” I thought “just Stick's Pass to tackle” and I knew that Charlie knew the way like the back of his hand. We were joined by Richard Ellis and Duncan Potts who I shook hands with then promptly excused myself as I

had to vomit. I felt a bit better after that and thought that maybe I could eat something now but nothing appealed. I tried a bit of a flatbread and some other proper food things and then gave up and went back on the Voom and Supernatural pouches. The group were chipper and it was nice just to listen to the banter. Richard stayed by my side and coaxed me to eat and run. As we approached Glenridding we sidled off onto the footpath and I changed my mind and thought the road would be faster as I turned to leave the bit of forest some vegetation grabbed hold of my foot and I was about to hit the tarmac hard when Richard managed to catch me “pew” that was close. I’d only just recovered from a serious knee injury where I’d tripped over a dog and smashed my patella .... I am not sure it would have taken another trauma too well! My knight in shining armour thought nothing of it ... just another day on duty! Stick’s Pass did not disappoint, I was struggling with the climb even before we got to the snow and the really strong winds, but once again my support team stepped in providing a much needed windshield that I just hid behind. One foot in front of the other, one piece of Voom bar ... it’s the last hill. “We’re a third of the way up” shouted Charlie happily.... “Oh no..... I thought we were at least halfway there”..... one way or another, slipping and sliding pushing and grinding I made it to the top and it was quite fun and magical with all the pretty snowflakes and the ground dressed in soft white snow. The descent was good and then we were back on the road which felt somewhat surreal to run along the A66 after the night on the fell. I arrived to dip a toe in Thirlmere just an hour later than planned... not too bad I thought.



Photo credit: Charlie Sproson

Leg 7 From here it would be plain sailing I thought just a road jog but as we left the lake and trotted up the road we went through the wrong gate. I'd done this once before on a recce years ago and ended up in the most awful bog littered with felled trees – definitely not the way you want to go. My instinct was to turn back but we'd already gone so far, so we kept going but the bog got deeper and deeper and there was definitely nothing of a path, the only way to stop from drowning in the bog was to precariously balance on wet, slippery tree trunks. It was absolutely hilarious. I was chuckling to myself thinking that I would never forget this and remembering that I had promised myself I would never go this way again and here I was floundering around in the mud trying to run an FKT. I know having supported many rounds myself and being responsible for the navigation how my support team would have felt but even at the time I was thinking this is much more interesting than the boring road and I wouldn't have changed a thing. There's nothing like a good bit of bog to make you grateful for having your feet on tarmac again... this thought would see me through the next 25km of road.

Derwent about an hour and a half behind schedule now, the extra 18 minutes I dropped largely attributable to bog floundering and calorie deficit. Not far to go now just me and Andy ford for the final two. I didn't even go to Deb's van but just kept

running, in hindsight I should have stopped and got some more food but I didn't want the temptation of the van comfort... I had to keep going.

Poor Andy had to pick up the pieces of a weather beaten, sleep deprived, calorie deprived but determined little runner. As we approached the only Lake on the round he made a desperate plea to the road support team to meet us on the main road to give me some coffee to wake me up! My husband Ben came with a cup of coffee and a cream scone – I jumped in the van to get warm with the heater and drank and ate what I could. Just 9km to go .... Come on.

When I had planned my schedule I thought to myself the last 9km should be easy – all road, all straightforward, no difficulty navigating, no big climbs and so near the end – how could 9km take longer than an hour? It took me 1 hour and 50 minutes! That's a slow walking pace. If I'm disappointed about anything on this round it was this final stretch and I know that I just didn't have the energy and couldn't keep the food down. I was unable to muster even a jog but I did push on. I pushed on knowing that I was going to make it and I pushed on knowing that my support crew were counting on me to get it done, I pushed on because I had promised Toddy "not if, when" and I pushed on because I knew that Joss would have been proud.

And finally it was Over.....



Photo credit: Tom McNally



Photo credit: Tom McNally

