

Lakes Meres and Waters

It's a great idea for a route. I'm always attracted to the idea of a big route in the Lake District, connecting many locations that I've visited before, but adding in some lesser known spots. I don't know many people who wouldn't like the sound of visiting every Lake, Mere and Water in one continuous route. Well, many would have second thoughts knowing the route was 100 miles.

At 6am on Saturday the 9th of May, myself, my partner James and first pacer Alex and her dog Mia, walked over to the shores of Loweswater to start the route. I'd chosen that weekend simply because my family of working farmers and a baker, were on a weekend off, and given no choice but being my support crew for the weekend. The previous couple of weeks had been home to good weather and we were all crossing our fingers that it would stretch until this weekend.

The morning dawned cloudless and cool. With a thin, low mist across the water the morning sunrise doused us in its golden glow. A perfect start to an adventure.

I touched the water, and me and Alex got underway on time, left James at the National trust car park and began a chatty run over to Crummock, passing hordes of Bluebells, and onto Buttermere. It was due to be a busy weekend in the Lakes. Without having much choice of weekend I hadn't paid close attention to any other events. The week of my attempt we realised that we would be contending with road closures and three huge events. Keswick to Barrow walk, The Lap ultra and on the Sunday, the Fred Whitton. Thankfully none of these ended up causing us any issues, but we appreciated a very quiet peaceful morning around Buttermere and up Red Pike.

Before we knew it we were down to Ennerdale and running back up towards Black Sail. I'd chosen more of a trail route for my attempt. Opting for more distance but less height and easier terrain on Black Sail pass. I enjoyed messaging others who had done the route on the build up to my attempt and seeing all the different route choices and finding out why people had opted for those routes.

We made easy work of the pass and were soon heading down to Wasdale Head where I would meet my second pacer Kim. The National Trust car park was rammed and there were a lot of people waiting at the gate for various Bob runners. We met Kim, filled up water bottles, ate a sausage roll and ran down to Wastwater to touch water number 5. We said goodbye to Alex and Mia and headed up the climb to Burnmoor tarn.

The next support point would be in Coniston. I'd decided to not have any more support on the west side of the Lakes due to access. I've run my fair share of big ultras, and didn't feel the need for lots of support early on. So it was just me and Kim from Wasdale to Coniston. We ran out to Devoke Water, before the seemingly miles long stretch to the Seathwaite. We passed the time non stop chatting, admiring fields of Bluebells and Wild garlic, spotting plants, birds and good spots on the river for a dip. Kim is that friend who could make the most boring run interesting with her enthusiasm and knowledge of flora and fauna.

Finally Walner Scar loomed above us and we began the long climb while packing in snacks before taking on the Old Man. We ticked off the next few in quick succession, Goat's water, onto the summit, down the

path to Low water and across the lovely terrace trod to Levers water. A leg of two halves, we enjoyed the change in terrain and were soon running down the miners track and into Coniston, more chatting and laughing along the way. James met us in Coniston with a welcome flask of coke which I downed on the way to Monk Coniston car park, touching Coniston Water along the way.

This was my first proper support point, my brother Phelan was vehicle support and we were meeting Amy, Jill and James as support for the next leg. Phelan plugged in my devices, handed me pizza and juice while James packed my bum bag so I could ditch the big pack for a leg. Rob Green from the club had also come out to see me through Coniston and had had the chance to speak to James about my attempt before I arrived.

The four of us set out ahead of time off to Esthwaite Water, making easy work of the road in fresh socks and a more cushioned shoe, It's impressive how a quick stop, clean socks and support with fresh legs can really pick you up. With three pacers I was fed a constant stream of snacks and fresh chat, although after having a sore throat and mild cold earlier in the week and the sheer amount of talking we'd done on the previous leg, my voice was definitely suffering more than the rest of me.

We ticked of Elterwater and reached Grasmere in time for the last of the light and to see hundreds of bluebells on the hillside right down to the Lake shore. Headtorches on, we visited Rydal Water and finished off at Waterhead, touching Windermere.

Phelan was waiting with the van with some hot food and a coffee made up. I threw on a big layer, and sat down to eat while James repacked my running pack which I would again carry overnight. My next pacers, Fran and Paul Ultra running duo, packed extra food and spare layers into their bags for me as the temperature was due to drop very low overnight. I changed my top half and my shoes and socks again and off we went into the night.

Writing a schedule had been the most difficult part of my prep, I'd never written one before and felt like I was just guessing how long a leg would take me, I'd been impressed that so far I'd made my timings and set off ahead of the schedule, but I knew the next leg to Glenridding would take longer than expected.

New pacers again brought new conversations, and we had a very long discussion about what goes into running distance and the importance of the head game which passed the time climbing Garburn pass but didn't do my voice any favours.

It was a clear but moonless night, and we admired heading into an area where we wouldn't be able to see any lights of civilisation, just us and the fells and the stars. Pretty special.

Skeggles water is a place everyone should visit, but not many people really know about. We ticked it off and got freshly wet feet heading up onto a path. Me and Fran then performed a quick torchlit sheep rescue, physically lifting a sheep over a fence as it had somehow got itself stuck in a very narrow gap between a fence and a drystone wall. We ran down the pass into Sadgill impressed at our own strength and began the next long climb up Gatescarth Pass which I much prefer from the other direction.

It had become noticeably colder with a bitter wind blowing down the pass, I'd been very happy in a long sleeve and shorts, cooling off after a sticky hot day, but it was time for some layers and some sugary snacks to fend off the tiredness that was creeping in. We ran down into Mardale Head, passing the time discussing how a little digger had been transported to the top of the pass, and the pros and cons of us trying to drive it back down the hill to save our legs. The moon had appeared big and bright from behind

Harrop Pike and we noticed the smallest change in light around the silhouette of the fells hinting that dawn was approaching.

We ticked off Haweswater which was thankfully full, and not too far to the water's edge, and were able to turn off the head torches on the way up to Small Water. From there we climbed straight up to just underneath Piot Crag and dropped down to Blea Water where we stopped a while to admire its surroundings which we all decided was Cathedral like. Up the steep climb to Riggindale Crag and we could see sunlight brushing the roof of the Cathedral, as we reached the ridge we were bathed in the glorious golden glow of the morning sun. Feeling very privileged to be out here at this time of day, we climbed up onto High Street, spotting a rare Ring Ouzel that lives on the crag, which I'd heard in the area before but never spotted.

We ran down High Street in the wind and the morning sun before dropping down to number 20, Hayeswater, and we joined the track down to the main road where we were faced with the cyclists. We had met the morning rush of the Fred Whitton flying alongside Brothers Water and it took us a few minutes to find a gap and cross over with as much haste as we could muster. I touched the water just as James came through the gate to meet us with a bottle of hot water, a banana and a chocolate crepe, which I devoured. Thankful for the surprise refuel we rejoined the road and began the run to Ullswater, with a few hundred cyclists for company. On the approach to Glenridding we needed to cross the road several times to run on the pavement, which was a tricky and welltimed operation, but we made it to Ullswater unscathed and rolled into the tourist info Car park, ready for some breakfast. Today's vehicle support was operated by my sisters, Katie and Erinna, they'd made me some hot food and James had driven over from Brothers Water and was sorting out my bag for the next leg which my pacer would be carrying, this time it was my Dad's turn to join me.

After some food and a hot drink, I gave my teeth a well needed brush (there's nothing quite like a reset) said a goodbye to Fran and Paul and set off with Dad to Sticks Pass. It was a sunny day, with a cool breeze, which made for perfect running weather. We made our way up to the youth hostel and onto the pass. Dad was attempting to make conversation, but I was struggling with the tiredness and part way up I knew I needed to give in to the drooping eyes and take a 10minute nap. It worked, I was moving better and managing some conversation. We reached the top, began to descend, and the conversation moved around to genetics. I remember blaming him for my decision to run really long distances.

The final section of Sticks Pass to Legburthwaite is not fun after 90 miles. At the bottom we met Rachael and her dog Hector, who were to join us until the end. They both brought some muchneeded high energy and I apologised straight away for my lack of conversation, which didn't phase Rachael and didn't stop her talking to me anyway. We reached Thirlmere which is again, a challenge at nearly 100 miles getting over the corner of the dam wall and back to touch the water. From there it felt like a long stretch to Derwent Water, running when I could and attempting to eat, and finally we made it to Castlerigg Farm.

Through Springs wood, Castlehead wood and Cockshot wood, and down to the water's edge, only two more to go. We ran through a busy Crow park and over to Booths car park, Rachael passing on the instructions to the team for icecream and coke. We entered the car park to cheers, Amy and Jill were back for the final leg. At the car, Erinna handed me a magnum and a can of coke, I was offered a seat but I'd decided at this point, I wasn't sitting down. I reached down to change my shoes, but Dad jumped in to do it for me, even changing over my socks, if that's not parental love I don't know what is! It was a quick turn around and we were off. Me, Rachael, Hector, Amy and Jill for the final leg.

I'd decided that I really didn't want to be running on the A591, so my route took footpaths wherever it could. We jogged out to Portinscale bridge, where Amy bought me a second icelolly because the first had been a real pick me up, and we joined the footpath along the river. Through fields chatting and laughing, we joined the road, then took a steep right into the woods to join one of the forestry tracks around to Dodd wood car park. We crossed the road again and were soon shuffling down to the church on the shores of Bassenthwaite. I bent down to touch the water, which was becoming increasingly difficult, and headed off in the direction of our final water.

The next few miles dragged. We joined the quiet road that would take us all the way to Overwater. I wasn't running much at this point, with it being mostly uphill, but the team were giving their best encouragement. With about a mile to go, Katie and Erinna appeared, after jogging over from the finish line. After what felt like hours, we could see the water, and I ran down the road to the car park where everyone was waiting. Dad, Phelan, James, Jill's partner Steph and their dog Floki who had been carting Amy and Jill around for the weekend, and Keri from my running club had come over to see the finish. Down to the water and a slow squat to touch it without falling in, and we were done.

I'm no stranger to running very long distances, and I've also run a lot further. But this wasn't about the distance. In 2023 my mum passed away, she had been my inspiration to run. We had shared many many miles together, taken part in events, we fast packed the West Highland way and the Hadrians wall path together. I ran her 100th park run with her and despite struggling with the cancer in her leg she still chose to suffer up Whinlatter park run. I'd wanted to do a run in memory of her for a while but couldn't decide on a route. In the end the Lakes Meres and Waters presented itself. A route that visits many places that we spent time together, and for it to be ran in the company of friends and family, sharing conversations, laughter and good snacks, It was exactly the adventure she would have loved. I feel very grateful to everyone that shared some miles with me, or made me hot drinks and bought icecream, and thank you to everyone who donated. We raised £1,790 for Sarcoma UK.