



The Lakes, Meres & Waters challenge attracted me as a fantastic opportunity to possibly break Joss Naylor's long-standing record from 1983 and to enjoy a different type of ultra challenge in the Lakes from the normal peak bagging. I looked at my performance at Lakeland 100 from a couple of years ago and thought the 19:14 was achievable if I could recreate a similar performance. I knew this would be no easy task with Lakeland being one of my best 100-mile performances. The challenge sat in the optimum area to excite me and in January I set about doing the work, to have the confidence in my fitness by May. In the week leading up to the event I did some tests to confirm I was in a great place to have a realistic chance, if I could execute the plan.

In the weeks leading up to the challenge I looked at the route and tried different lines to see if I could get the best route and one very similar to Joss with a big exception around Haweswater. I had initially thought about going Overwater to Loweswater but a long day from Coniston to Buttermere reminded me how descending off Red Pike would feel after 90+ miles, so I switched back to the regular direction.

On Monday morning 4<sup>th</sup> May, just before 5am, sat in the car park near Loweswater, I felt excited and relaxed for the day ahead. It was a similar feeling to before the 24-hour Lake District fell record where there was no fear of failure, I just felt I had an opportunity to make history and if I did not, then I knew I would have given my best. The weather was perfect, a still cool morning by the shores of Loweswater with the dawn light and Josh Wade to be my mule and be full of endless enthusiasm for the run. I set off at a brisk pace, as to match the splits, I needed to. There is nothing quite like the flow you feel with fresh tapered legs after a fantastic block of training. I was delighted to have got the journey started, soon touching Crummock Water and trying to keep relaxed on the less than smooth shore path to Buttermere. Bang on schedule to Buttermere and the first real indicator of a positive start.



Climbing up the steep path over Red Pike I focused on keeping the intensity under control, still talking reasonably well to Josh and focused on a relaxed flow down the steep descent into Ennerdale trying to save the quads for later in the day. I made sure to keep on the gas for the flat running to touch Ennerdale Water and happy to be only a couple minutes down on record pace. One of my favourite sections of the day followed with up over the pass near Haystacks and choosing to take the fell line linking in with reverse Wasdale fell race route and a contour around Seatallan before dropping down into Greendale. I imagined the number of times Joss must have run this route and to have slightly deviated on his run. I was delighted to hit the shores

of Wast Water with the exact same split, the day had got off to a good start and my smile was building. One little bump over into Eskdale Green to wave goodbye to Josh and pick up James Gibson and Steve Hopwood for the leg to Coniston Water.

A change of shoes into my La Sportiva Prodigio Pros is as good as a rest and off we went towards Devoke Water. I was not sure how this leg would play out compared to Joss's times



with no GPX or Strava trace but trying to piece a route together using information from his book. I went for the direct fell climb and descent into Devoke involving a few tussocks to get to the lake before finding a nice sheep trod to cut the corner and to hit the Birker Fell Road. After a couple KM's we turned off to take the rougher route across the fields, over the moor and down via the mines to hit the main Duddon Valley road rather than following the road all the way to Ulpha. Running up the road towards Seathwaite, I really appreciated the company to distract from the monotony of the long road section and to help keep me to a good strong pace.

Starting up the Walna Scar there was some weariness starting to creep in and by halfway to the pass I snapped out of it and found the rhythm to run this section. On reaching the pass we turn back to fell running with a lovely contour section to Goat's Water and a steep hiking climb up towards the Old Man Coniston with James now in his element again. The descent to Lows Water meant dodging a few tourists on the way up only to soon leave them behind with the contour through the cliffs to Levers Water and a happy flow down into Coniston and the Lake beyond. With only a 5 min deficit to Joss's time I was very happy to



be still this close.



Meeting Angela White my crew for Coniston and picking up Emma Stuart and Hannah Rickman boosted my already high morale as their excitement and energy shifted into me. The one fuelling mistake happened early in this leg as I decided to slurp down a lovely chocolate recovery drink while bouncing up the hill out of Coniston and over towards Hawkshead. Something was not quite sitting right and sure enough after Esthwaite Water and before

Elterwater, the contents of my stomach appeared violently. With no time to hesitate, I quickly got back up to pace and felt a lot better for it. I was enjoying the difference this South Lakeland section brought with more runnable terrain, and I really liked the blue bells in High Close woods in full bloom. Thanks to Emma being the hammer, which she took far too much

joy in being, I had caught back up to record pace by Windermere.

I knew from the splits and from Joss's stories this was a section where I had an opportunity to get ahead. Now with the record bothering Damian Hall and Rob Brown for the long section to Brothers Water I set off for Skeggles Water in the heat of the day getting only a little hot and bothered on the climbs. The early pace was now starting to impact on my speed and my fuelling rate dropped with less appetite for consumption of gels. Steady away towards



Troutbeck with flashbacks to Lakeland 100 and how the race unfolded a couple years earlier. On arrival at Skeggles Water, I got the news I had hoped for with a 15 min gain and I celebrated with a dip to cool down the core temperature.



decided to include Kentmere Reservoir, to



remove any doubt the record if I had broken it without going, like Joss

had done 43 years earlier. However, I saw an opportunity in route choice on the next section by going to Haweswater after Small Water and back up to Blea Water before scaling High Street to get to Hayeswater which was a different order to Joss who went to Blea Water after Small Water. The Nan Bield pass was an uphill slog in the late afternoon and descending towards Haweswater did not seem to flow. On nearing the Reservoir I could see my mum, Martin Stone and Scott Newburn had turned up to cheer me through this remote location and this alongside the carrot cake gave me a big moral boost for the climb over High Street. Topping out onto the plateau was awesome with beautiful views in the afternoon light with the shadows making the mountains stand out. I was grateful to have had reasonable legs descending the steep grassy bank and the track away from Hayeswater towards Brothers Water. A happy moment came when chief

supporter, 9-year-old Ada had come with a sign and ran the last 500m to the handover with us. The strategy had worked, I had gained 30 mins on record pace.

On the next leg I had Carol Morgan and Matt Stapley to guide me over the last big climb, Sticks Pass towards Thirlmere. We were all very happy once we had left the tarmac and dicing with traffic on the road to Patterdale. I was now firmly digging deep into my reserves to keep the intensity up and I listened to the chat with no energy left spare for conversation now. The timings worked out brilliantly for a spectacular sunset while we ran down towards Thirlmere and I could now start to see the record was possible.



Onto the final leg with Matt Harris and Sabrina Vergee on her bike providing the moral encouragement to keep me ticking along on this last mostly road leg visiting Derwent Water and Lake Bassenthwaite on the way to Overwater. There was no way I would be complaining about suffering to Sabs, just needed to dig deep and keep ticking off the miles. Time had started to slip on the gains I had made by Ullswater, clearly a bath at Hartsop had refreshed Joss for his last couple of legs. Once I hit the last

climb slowly ascending the last couple hundred metres towards Overwater my pace increased, I could now sense the finish line. It was great to run in with a crowd of 11 and one dog including Ada who had been allowed to stay up late for the special occasion.

A big smile day with friends achieved when I ran into Overwater and set a new benchmark time, 18 hours 50 minutes 34 seconds. A big thank you to my wife Ally Love who is my biggest supporter and to all my friends who were part of this special day. I hope this time does not take another 43 years to be broken and others get inspired to push their limits on this Lake District challenge.

