

## Lakeland 100 - Ultra Tour of the Lake District

I did this because I didn't know I could ! "Chris Little"



I did the Bob Graham 7 years ago in 2004 and have always had a hankering to do a 100 mile ultra, inspired by NFR members recent attempts at UTMB and the LDWA 100 miler in Northumberland.

I'd also convinced my wife Jan to enter the Lakes 50 and so we both entered in October last year and started training and receiving the route. This amounted mostly to a maximum of 30-35 miles over a number of consecutive weekends during May & June on the route with a few long days in Northumberland (not really enough!)

Also taking part were 'Dangerous' Dave Coxon, Louise 'Wilko' Wilkinson & Joe 'Ultra' Faulkner doing the 100 and in the 50 Chris Rowe, the two Michelles (Armstrong & Moran) Katherine Davis and Naomi Miskin running together. I found out later that Lawrence Johnson and Peter Moralee had also ran the 50. Another friend of ours who'd been instrumental in us entering the event Neil Carr was also taking part in the 50 for the second year running.

After working from early Friday morning we set off in the campervan to arrive at John Ruskin School to a packed field of tents campers and caravans. I got myself sorted out and lined up on the startline with another 224 runners in the 100 miler. I ended up near the front at the start. At 5.30pm the gun fired and we were off



I had a schedule I was planning on running too (based on a maximum time of 35.5 hours) I was really aiming for something closer to 30 hours so knew that this was slowest pace I wanted to run at. This was based on times of arrival & departure at the checkpoints. Allowing an average of 15 minutes at each checkpoint.

All started well and I ran a good pace over the first section to Seathwaite revelling in the long rocky downhill after Walna Scar Pass, I overtook a number of runners without really having to push to hard and arrived at the first checkpoint in 1hr 20mins and 42<sup>nd</sup> place and about 15 minutes up on schedule. 7 mile down only 98 miles to go (oh yes the route actually covers 105 miles!)

I was more concerned about the next section from recce's I'd undertaken, from Seathwaite to Boot its only 7 mile but over some boggy & rough terrain and I wanted to get this done and onto Wasdale before dusk, I got wet feet on the boggy section after Grassguards Farm and sank up to my knees in places on wet rooty single track through the plantation. Despite this it went better than expected and I reached Boot checkpoint still feeling strong and now in 41<sup>st</sup> place in 1 hour 30 from the last CP. It felt surreal to run past the two pubs in the village with people sitting in the beer gardens, supping their pints and cheering me on but inspirational none the less

I left Boot and climbed up the path and through two gates before the open moor, suddenly it hit me like a bolt of lightning that I'd forgotten to dib-in at the CP oh bugger - I ran back only to be told by the marshall that I had already dibbed!!

So back again up the track through the gates and onto the open moor and past Burnmoor Tarn. The views opened up after the tarn across Wasdale to Kirk Fell incredible scenery of what was to come! Down past Brackenclough Climbing Hut and over the bridge at Lingmell Beck leading onto a horrible road for about 1km (I don't like roads) before turning off to the next CP at Wasdale Head in 43<sup>rd</sup> position and around 50 minutes up on schedule

The next section was a tough one from from Wasdale to Buttermere in the dark and with almost 2500 foot of climbing in under 7 mile The route is also very rocky climbing up to Black Sail Pass traversing around Kirk Fell down to Black Sail Youth Hostel . I followed a group of runners in the darkness to the Hut and then up Scarth Gap Pass by myself pushing on to the summit and then the rocky descent toward Buttermere. This passes through 2km of forest track running along the lakeside and seemed to last forever although it was easy going in comparison with rocky ground before that. I reached Buttermere CP in 43<sup>rd</sup> position after 6 hours & 18mins of running after 26.5mile

It was pitch black no moon and although I knew the next section well I was also aware it would be easy to go wrong and miss the turn off up to toward Whiteless Breast so for the first time I got out the map & checked the road book to make sure I didn't miss it. I'd followed a group of 3 runners out of the CP but I just couldn't keep to their pace and so found myself totally by myself on this section. I could see a procession of lights in front traversing around the hills on their way to Sail pass. I was starting to slow down on the climbs and seemed to be forever tripping up and falling on the narrow grassy trods between the high fern & bracken that followed a steadily rising traverse around Whiteless Pike & Wandope. Two runners caught me up approaching Sail Pass, but I knew I'd be fine on the rocky descent into Braithwaite so I just followed them into the CP. I took a longer break here I was over 1.5 hours up on schedule so had plenty of time to rest and eat. There was a plentiful supply of good food and energy drinks and it was warm and welcoming. I was in 46<sup>th</sup> position and still feeling good having covered 33 miles of the route in 8hrs & 18mins

I must have stayed for 20-25 minutes and when I left the warmth & comfort of Braithwaite Village Hall I was cold and shivering so I put on my long top and waterproof and set off on what must be the least enjoyable part of the route running along the side of the A66 toward Keswick. No sign of any runners behind or in front, it was a lonely cold run in the dark along the A66. The section after this is probably the most familiar to me being part of the Bob Graham Round and also a route I've walked, biked & even paraglided over many times. Past Fitz Park over the A66 up Spooney Green Lane and around the side of Latrigg and upto Underscar Car park at the bottom of Skiddaw/Jenkin



Hill. I relaxed and enjoyed running this, feeling good on familiar territory. As I rounded Lonscale Fell traversing into the valley between Blease & Skiddaw the wind increased and the temperature dropped and the first signs of dawn appeared as the sky lightened and I could see silhouettes of high lenticular clouds. What a bizarre and beautiful time to be running through the lakes!

Before I turned toward the Blencathra Centre I looked across the other side of the valley to see a stream of lights just rounding Lonscale Fell. It spurred me on. I arrived at CP 6 (Blencathra Ctr) in 52<sup>nd</sup> position and still well up on schedule. I didn't hang around long I felt cold and the check point was not indoors. One very welcoming addition here was the offer of new free dry socks so I selected a pair from a large box. This came at just the right time as I could feel hot spots on the soles of my feet caused by the wet saturated socks I'd put up with since the unavoidable bogs of section 2 !

The next section is just under 8 miles to Dockray CP and follows what seems to be a lot of bridleway & wide tracks again passing familiar territory along the Old Coach Road past my favourite paragliding site of Clough Head and past Wolf Crag another launch point. I caught a few runners shortly after leaving the CP and ran with them through a contrived route to the old railway line then up the boggy steep hill at the base of Clough Head to reach the Old Coach Road. I wasn't looking forward to running this I knew how long this goes on for having driven along it in 4x4's to reach paraglider take offs. At least it was getting light but I was struggling to eat much and could only manage a quarter of a power gel. I couldn't face anymore sweet sickly bars or gels. The runners I'd been with gained a bit of a lead on me on the flattish track leading to check point 7 a tent in the car park at the end of the Old Coach Road about 2 miles from Dockwray village. I managed to get some soup here which was a welcome break from the awful energy foods I'd had so far. Now in 56<sup>th</sup> place out of a diminishing field of 186 with 38 runners having already retired. It was 6.30am and my scheduled arrival time was 8.40am . 2 hours 10 minutes up on schedule!

Section 8 to Dalemain is the longest at just over 10 mile and has a bit of a love hate relationship for me. The section from Dockwray around Gowbarrow Fell is wonderful technical terrain with stunning views over Ulswater across to High Street but the later sections are on dreaded roads. I set off on the road descending to Dockwray looking forward to the first section to come. The soles of my feet were sore and were starting to blister but I knew I couldn't get blister packs or tape to stick to these areas without this causing more problems. I put it to the back of my mind and focused on enjoying the new day ahead, I loved the section from the woods traversing around Gowbarrow through Swinburn Woods and over fields to Bennethead. I then had to run on long quiet roads to Dacre which was a slog particularly on the slowly ascending road sections. It was also starting to get hot and it was still early morning! I arrived at Dacre and followed the footpath path past the fantastic Dacre Castle and on tracks to Dalemain the supposed half way point at 59.1 miles! On route I joined another runner who was actually walking as fast as I could run (Mick ?) apparently he'd been a very good fell runner but had to stop running due to a recurring injury so now was walking/jogging the 100 – quite impressive! I also met Lindsay Faulkner just before Dalemain and I walked with her for 10 minutes during which time she tried to sabotage me by giving me a small sample of homemade cheese pastie which I duly choked on and I almost had her doing the Heimlich manoeuvre on me to free the offending particle. Luckily after some very heavy thumping on my back I survived and continued to Dalemain. Arriving at 9.17am and slipping down to 64<sup>th</sup> position out of a remaining 180 runners and now 2hrs 30mins up on schedule. Lindsay had told me I was about an hour up on Joe Faulkner and that Louise had retired due to being ill. I felt sorry for Louise I knew she must have

been bad to have dropped out as she is probably one of the toughest people I know. I also met Dave Coxon at Dalemain who'd also pulled out at Buttermere failing to make the cut off due an unexpectedly slow running partner and a navigational error (However Dave was allowed to unofficially join in the 50 miler and had a good run) After about 20 minutes of rest, food and drink Joe arrived as I was about to set off toward Howtown. He was in no hurry and managed to get a massage as I was setting off. I shouted back to him he'd catch me as soon as we hit the hills and off I set toward Howtown.

This is another 7 mile section running through fields to Pooley Bridge and then upto and below the High Street ridge. All enjoyable easy going. Running through Pooley Bridge seeing people playing by the river and wondering around the shops sitting in cafes and pubs was just bizarre whilst trundling by after running 61 miles. I spotted Joe in the distance making ground on me as I ran toward High Street. I arrived at Howtown CP feeling pretty grim a combination of heat and lack of food still being unable to stomach anything. Joe arrived soon after. I attempted to eat some fruit cake and had to make a swift exit to throw up. I returned inside to pull myself round before setting off with Joe. I was still 2 hours 20mins up on schedule and had regained 3 places lying 61<sup>st</sup> out of the 159 runners left (21 dropping out at Dalemain!)

It was now around midday as I made my way on the next 9 mile section toward Mardale Head. It was hot and sunny with little wind climbing up up Fusedale Valley. Joe had already powered past me and was passing other runners ahead. I was knackered out of reserves and struggling with the climb up to High Kop a few others passed me including Jonathon Steele (Team Hardmoors) an ex para who I'd raced with on some earlier descents. He was ahead of me earlier but had made a wrong turn and was trying to make up ground. After the nice grassy decent to Low Kop I took a poor line heather bashing down to Haweswater then followed the path contouring the Lakeside for what felt like an eternity. Eventually I reached the CP at Mardale Head car park 4 hours and 20 minutes after leaving Howtown now only 2 hours up on schedule. It was about 4pm and I was feeling very tired with blistered feet and little energy with a big rocky climb up Gategarth Pass to contend with. Only 146 runners of the 224 starters were still in the race, (I was 76<sup>th</sup>) and there was talk amongst some runners at the CP of packing in. Alice Robson & James Briscoe running as a mixed pair (Pair 227) were suffering from badly blistered feet and James was on the verge of calling it a day. We got talking and I pronounced we'd covered almost 76 mile so had completed over 75% and how bad they'd feel if they jacked it at this stage. Alice was inspirational and declared the 3 of us would get through no matter what. That was it we were all fired up and set off along with Jonathon Steele on our way up Gatesgarth Pass.

The next section to Kentmere is only 6.5 miles but tough to start; climbing up the Pass on rocky terrain I walked up with Jonathon following Alice & James we chatted to take our minds off what we were doing. Jonathon was on unfamiliar territory now, not having reccied this section so we stuck together while I navigated the route through complex gaps in walls crossing the paths approaching Kentmere. Jonathon was in as bad a state as me with blisters and waves of nausea and swaying around whilst running so we were both very pleased to have made it into Kentmere and were really beyond caring about times. For me just completing at this stage was all that mattered. It was 7.10pm and I was now only 50 minutes up on my 35.5 hour schedule (although I didn't realise or care at that stage) The 15 minute scheduled stop extended to over an hour although I wasn't timing it. Jonathon and I were being very well cared for getting blistered feet taped and bandaged, being force fed and

being questioned about our food intake. I was warned that I should be taking on more electrolytes and salts and to eat more food. I was asked if I intended to continue (I much have looked a state!) I responded in no uncertain terms "after covering 82 miles there was no bloody way I was packing in now" I was dazed sat in a corner when I spotted the two Michelles with Katherine Davis & Naomi arrive then I saw Neil Carr arrive. Then Chris Rowes family arrived asking about Chris I thought he'll be long gone as he was planning on completing the run around the 10 hour mark but I was told he'd also been ill and had retired between Mardale Head & Kentmere. He turned up 10 minutes later much to their relief looking well ill a few encouraging words between us and I departed planning to run with the girls over the next section to Ambleside but they were away quicker than I expected and I was in no condition to try to keep up. (78<sup>th</sup> out of 129)

Neil left shortly after so I joined up him and we climbed up the Gatesgarth Pass together I kept encouraging Neil to leave me so he could beat his time he set last year, but once on the downhill on the way towards Troutbeck I picked up the pace and started to feel rejuvenated. It was great to be running with Neil and really motivating. As we climbed up steep roads through Troutbeck we were joined by Andy Treweeke (No 15) and somewhere around the same point caught up with James and Alice again. We ran together with Neil leading the way on to Ambleside. A few people stood outside in the streets to cheer us on before we arrived at the CP in Lakes Runner to meet Neils Partner Jane and a small crowd of people cheered us in. It was just so encouraging to have this support and to see Jane. It was now 11.45pm (and I was now about 1 hour down on schedule! although I wasn't looking any more and 81<sup>st</sup> out of 125 remaining runners) We left the CP together as a team on route to Chapel Stile.

This section was 8 miles but seemed to last forever in the darkness. I drifted into a trance like state and continued to fall asleep momentarily as I was jogging along. It felt pretty awful at first but then I adapted and tried to sleep while I was moving, it worked but not for long enough to feel any better for it, infact it just seemed to perpetuate the condition. Not much was spoken between us all but the fact that we were running together instilled a great sense of camaraderie and motivation. I heard Alice and James talking about sleep deprivation and the effects it was having on them It turned out they were both junior doctors and were used to it, but not quite as bad as this! As we moved on along the Cumbria Way past Elterwater I started to see rabbits and doughnuts darting out in front of me and faces in trees and hedges I realised I was hallucinating! This went on until we reached Chapel Stile CP It was 1.05 am Sunday morning (10 minutes behind schedule and 77<sup>th</sup> out of a remaining 119) This was like a hippy commune in a marquee attached to a cottage with a log burner and seats and cushions scattered around. I asked Neil to wake me so I could have 10 minutes sleep but now I couldn't sleep!!! We chilled, had beef stew and drinks before preparing ourselves for the Langdales in pitch black darkness with no moon to provide any light.

I can't remember much of this section only falling into the same condition of momentarily sleeping and hallucinating from time to time. Passing by the campsite at Langdale all was quiet no revellers were up even looking across to the Dundgeon Gill Pub & Hotel all was quiet I kept a track of our route following Neil along with James, Alison & Andy keeping an eye out for the higher traverse approaching the trees before the steep uphill at Side Pike Pass, but Neil was on already on it. My spirits lifted and I pulled myself round as we approached Tilberthwaite engaging James and Alice in conversation maybe unwillingly! We arrived as a group together at the tent CP at 4.45am Sunday and sprawled in the seats being looked after with food & drinks. (I was just under 2 hours behind my

schedule although I didn't know it) I knew now I would finish with only 3.5 miles remaining to the end. (77<sup>th</sup> out of 118)

We had to endure a rain shower for the first time on the event so it was on with the waterproofs as we set off up the steep steps passing the quarries and on route along the hanging valley between the CP and Coniston. As we started on the steep descent on the far side I looked at my watch I wanted to get in on 36 + hours and I saw Andy and Neil start to quicken the pace as we descended We agreed to press on and to go for a running finish in the last 1-2 miles. This eventually led to a sprint finish from Miners Bridge down the track past the Black Bull Inn and back to John Ruskin School to around of applause by all in the Hall. I'd done it 105 miles completed in 36hours 53 mins (78<sup>th</sup> out of 116 remaining runners and 1 hour 20mins behind schedule but who cares about that its about the journey and what a journey it was)

My wife Jan also completed the 50 within her schedule to add to a winning weekend

A big thanks to Neil Carr for running with me it counted more than you realise for getting me through.

What a great event and organisation and well done to all those who had the tenacity and courage to enter and a great achievement for those completing .





