23 Before Tea
Pete Faulkner

written by Adrian Thomas

The record for the 23 before Tea fell-running challenge here at Elterwater has been smashed – by the man who got close only a month ago.



Pete Faulkner knocked 70 minutes off his own best time, completing the 39 mile, 23 summits route, with some 16000 ft of climbing, in 11 hours and 23 minutes. That's 55 minutes off the previous record set this summer by Richard Bolton.

The circuit, taking in 23 Wainwright peaks in a continuous loop from Elterwater, was originally conceived by us here at Elterwater Hostel as a shorter, possibly more achievable, homage to Paul Tierney's record-breaking Wainwright round in 2019. We used the map of Paul's Wainwrights' route (devised by Steve Birkinshaw, the previous record holder), placing the hostel at the centre, to find a circular route which could be done in a day, and be back in time for tea.

Pete made his first attempt last month after coming back from injury which had put him out of action for most of the summer. It was his first long run after the injury. And he did say at the time that now he knew what was expected, he'd be back for another go. But we were surprised he turned up again so soon, especially at the end of a week of very poor, wet weather here in the Lakes.

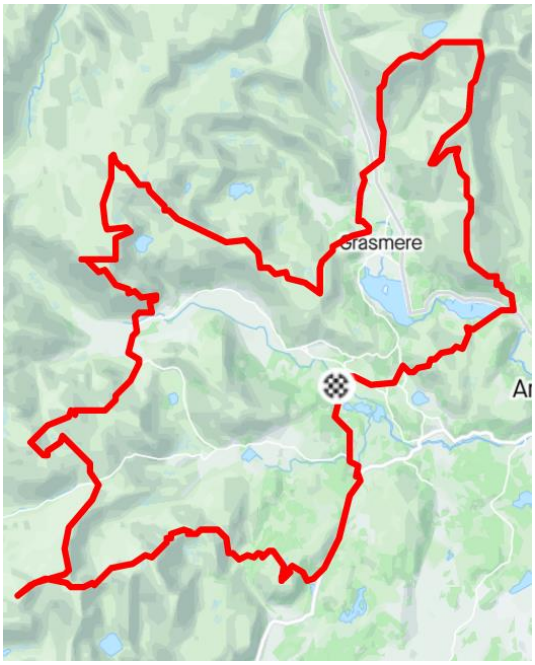
Pete, who lives in Cockermouth and is a member of Cumberland Fell Runners, says he has been working towards the 23 before Tea round for a year. "At first it was motivation to explore new areas of the Lake District and tick off some different Wainwrights, but as my recces progressed I felt I could challenge for the record, and possibly even break the 12-hour benchmark that was the original intention of the challenge.



"After a summer off running due to a lower leg injury sustained during my latest solo Bob Graham attempt in June, I finally felt I was fit enough to attempt 23 before Tea in September. Perfect summer conditions meant the going was good, but sourcing and filtering water after such a dry spell cost me a lot of time and, ultimately, I missed the record by 15min.

"Running the route in its entirety highlighted some developments that could be made and some streamlining that could be done, and I was confident the record was achievable – if I could get another round in before winter."

After a week of biblical rain, Saturday October 8 dried a little but the weather was still changeable, and ground conditions were exceptionally slippery under foot. “But I wanted to take the chance before the weather really turned. So I set out in the dark just after 6am armed with a more streamlined route (including swapping out the Wainwrights of Black Crag and Lingmoor for Grey Friar and High Raise, reducing the route by 2.4miles and 800ft of ascent/descent).



“I kept a careful eye on my splits throughout, taking extra caution when the ground conditions were particularly treacherous but pushing where they allowed, and ultimately came in in 11hrs 23minutes, 55minutes under the previous record.”

Pete said that the best part of the day was enjoying tea and flapjack at the Elterwater Hostel afterwards “while talking to some lovely ladies about our days in the hills!”

He added: “I’d like to thank you for conceiving and endorsing such a wonderful challenge – it’s a fantastic motivation to explore one of the nicest areas of the Lake District, all supported by the wonderful hospitality of the Elterwater Hostel. It’s things like this that really help develop and strengthen the outdoor community, and it a truly wonderful thing to be a part of.

“I’m really pleased to have got it in before winter, although it was very slippery out there after all the rain this week, so I reckon I might have to revisit it again next summer.”

The first to complete the round was Little Dave Cummins, in a time of 14 hours and 50 minutes, before Paul Wilson (chairman of the Bob Graham Club) took a whopping 2 hours and 9 minutes off the time last year.

Strava link

You can read the history of the challenge here:

https://www.elterwaterhostel.co.uk/23before-tea-a-new-challenge-for-runners-in-the-lakes/

If you want to have a go, please contact us here at the hostel. You can stay here the night before and after. And if you want to split the route into two or three more manageable days, we think that’s a pretty good effort too!

	Previous Record (Richard Bolton)	PeteF 14/09/22	Difference		PeteF 08/10/22	Diff (record)	Diff (14/09/22)
Black Crag	0:38	0:31	-00:07				
Holme Fell	1:21	1:15	-00:06		0:47	-00:33	-00:28
Wetherlam	2:30	2:18	-00:12		1:51	-00:39	-00:27
Swirl How	2:52	2:42	-00:10		2:16	-00:36	-00:26
				Grey Friar	2:28		
Great Carrs	2:56	2:47	-00:09		2:41	-00:15	-00:06
Cold Pike	3:42	3:35	-00:07		3:30	-00:12	-00:05
Pike O'Blisco	4:04	3:56	-00:08		3:52	-00:12	-00:04
Lingmoor	4:56	4:52	-00:04				
Loft Crag	6:19	6:26	+00:07		5:17	-01:02	-00:51
Pike O'Stickle	6:24	6:33	+00:09		5:24	-01:00	-00:51
Harrison Stickle	6:40	6:50	+00:10		5:42	-00:58	-01:08
Pavey Ark	6:51	7:04	+00:13		5:58	-00:53	-01:06
Thunacar Knott	6:58	7:09	+00:11		6:04	-00:54	-01:05
				High Raise	6:20		
Sergeant Man	7:14	7:26	+00:12		6:27	-00:47	-00:59
Blea Rigg	7:34	7:35	+00:01		6:52	-00:42	-00:43
Silver How	8:07	8:23	+00:16		7:28	-00:39	-00:55
Seat Sandal	9:31	9:48	+00:17		8:45	-00:46	-00:57
Fairfield	10:00	10:22	+00:22		9:16	-00:44	-01:06
Great Rigg	10:12	10:30	+00:18		9:27	-00:45	-01:03
Stone Arthur	10:25	10:41	+00:16		9:42	-00:43	-00:59
Heron Pike	10:56	11:15	+00:19		10:11	-00:45	-01:04
Nab Scar	11:05	11:24	+00:19		10:24	-00:41	-01:00
Loughrigg	11:58	12:11	+00:13		11:04	-00:54	-01:07
Elterwater Hostel	**12:18**	**12:33**	**+00:15**		**11:23**	**-00:55**	**-01:10**