Cumbria Way – 122km, 2610m ascent, 30h:47m, solo and unsupported

(Mon 3rd – Tue 4th April 2023)

When I awoke, my back, left hip, left knee and the top of my right foot hurt. I struggled stepping into the bath for a shower and had to hold both handrails as I descended the stairs for breakfast. I was hardly a shining example of athletic prowess! But I stuck to the task of eating a very large full English breakfast, taking it slowly and drinking a large amount of orange juice. When I returned to my room, I did some stretching in between packing my sack. I pondered what to do: I could sight-see around Ulverston before catching a train to Carlisle or I could set off knowing that if I wanted to stop, I could eventually catch buses to get close enough to Caldbeck for John to pick me up. I had a quick look at the dots of those on the Northern Traverse and saw that Alison was still moving. She hadn't had the luxury of a bed, bath and full English so the least I could was set off and see what happened. I've discovered that pains have the habit of eventually subsiding and it was a glorious day, sunny but with a chill to the air keeping it cool. So I decided to give it a go, walked to the start and stood next to the sculpture that I'd seen many times in photographs. I meant to set off at 10am but it was not until 11:15am that I departed; since I would have to walk through the night it didn't really matter what time I set off.

The route began, not surprisingly, in a similar manner to how the previous day ended – verdant fields and quiet roads. My foot soreness had yet to return but I loathed the sight of tarmac. After a couple of hours I caught up and had a chat with a chap also doing the Way. He was wild camping and was in the enviable position of going faster than anticipated, whereas in my schedule I'd forgotten to take into account what I'd done the previous day so was already behind! Shortly after I had a nice chat to a farmer walking along the road and gave him a hand rounding up an errant sheep and lamb. At the amusingly named Tottlebank the path took to moorland and by Beacon Tarn had become a peaty swamp. The day was warming up and I was getting a little sweaty. I kept a pot of Vaseline handy and sometimes ran with my shorts down to air things off. I worried about what would people think if I fell over and was knocked unconscious! By Coniston Water, all my pains had dissipated – I just wish they hadn't taken nearly 5 hours to do so, and it wasn't long before my foot soreness returned to replace them. I passed through a campsite, occasionally passing people on the track coming the other way. Despite me looking at them and saying "hello" not one of them replied. After passing one mute woman I noticed she'd just walked past an empty crisp packet on the track – what the ****'s wrong with people! I had another 97km to go but I picked it up – fortunately I was able to drop it in a bin 50m later.

I tried to ignore the lure of ice-creams in Coniston where many folk were sitting outside eateries enjoying the warmth and sunshine. Approaching Tarn Hows I started to run a little more quickly. I thought, if I could get my blood pumping a faster it might reduce the soreness of my feet. I don't know if it was psychosomatic but it seemed to work a little. My spirits were also lifted by being back in Borrowdale Volcanic Group rocks. Above Skelwith Bridge, after having been going for 8 hours, I stopped to eat. It wouldn't be long before the sun dropped behind the hills so I thought I'd catch the last of its warmth. I'd not eaten anything for over 9 hours, apart from consuming about a litre of High5 energy drink, and yet I'd never felt hungry – that full English definitely did the trick! This time, I massaged the heating pouch first to get the reaction going before putting the food pouch in. It also worked great as a foot warmer! The sky was clear and it looked as if it was going to be a cold night, so I changed my top for the smelly but dry one from the day before, put on my base layer leggings, taped my big toe bones (which I wouldn't want to do overnight if it became necessary), and put on my clean and only slightly damp socks from the previous day. I was stopped for 45 minutes but it was worth it since I felt quite refreshed afterwards and ran a lot of the following several kilometres. Darkness fell and I found the long Langdale a bit of a drag. Foot soreness was making me avoid rock as much as possible. I was glad when I reached the turn for Stake Pass. I was also glad of the engineered path on the way up, but not so much on the way down. I channelled my inner donkey and shuffled down the zig-zags. The path down Langstrath became increasingly rocky and the journey to the left turn became a drag – my purple patch was over. The track alongside Stonethwaite Beck was unrunnable rubble and what looked like an easy run on the map took an age. From the top of Stake Pass to Portinscale the route was similar or the same as a few others I've done recently: St Bega's Way, the Gerry Charnley

Round and the No Cure, Always Hope Ultra. When doing these I was also in the dark at this point and rather pooped, especially the latter two.

I was little concerned that I might become uncontrollably sleepy so around 3am I decided to have a short nap. I stopped at a footbridge because I thought the wood would be warmer than the ground and I didn't anticipate anybody wanting to cross it for the short time I would be there. I put on my fleece, duvet jacket and waterproof jacket set my alarm for 20 minutes and lay down on my sack. I was only wearing thin gloves and for some reason I didn't lift my hands up in to my sleeves. All I can remember is freezing hands and shivering and yet I must have slept a little because it seemed only an instant before my alarm went off. It's quite surprising that when running/walking I was only wearing a thermal base layer on top and yet when stationary four layers weren't enough to prevent me shivering quite violently. A little after setting off I crossed some duck boards with ice crystals forming on them. I felt slightly refreshed, perhaps helped by easier running to Keswick.

The streets of Keswick were eerily quiet, although I was passed by a couple of vehicles as dawn was approaching. My feet had become so sore again that I was taking every opportunity to sit down, which was both soothing and annoying. I hadn't eaten for 9 hours so shortly after crossing the A66 I added water to a freeze-dried meal, put it into my rucksack netting and continued whilst it rehydrated. I stopped just before the Latrigg car park to eat it (no heat this time). Half-an-hour earlier I'd begun to feel slightly sick and as soon as I took a mouthful, I felt nauseous. I couldn't eat it; I'd left it too long before eating again. Unfortunately, from past experience, I knew what this meant – I wouldn't be able to eat or drink for the rest of the trip. Oh well, I'd done the same for 11 hours when doing Wainwright's Western Fells so I would just have to do the same again. I put my now useless, dead-weight of a meal back in my sack and continued. I tried my luck a little on a couple of occasions by taking a mouthful of water, but both resulted in me retching, so I didn't try again. On the bright side, dawn was breaking as I rounded Lonscale Fell on the way to Skiddaw House.

Mosedale was a swampy drag, as was the climb to Lingy Hut. I was pleased to reascend High Pike, the final significant climb, and enjoyed the run to Caldbeck, although my internal calibration was now such that everything looking a very long way away. Caldbeck was awash with life, with many little people doing an Easter egg hunt. I didn't dare tell John I was passing through as I might never have continued. I sent him a message an hour later from Sebergham so he knew I was on the final stretch.

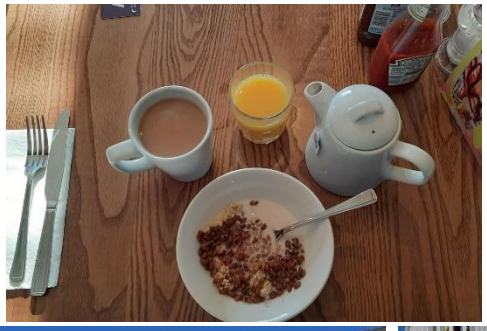
I didn't feel sleepy but I wasn't fully conscious either. I decided to try another nap. In contrast to 3am, it was warm and sunny so I just lay down by the river, but, like a chimpanzee, I should have taken care with my bed-making because I was uncomfortable and didn't sleep well. After 20 minutes I got up and continued, feeling no better for the rest. The normal route was blocked by gas works so I took a diversion on the east side of the Caldew. It was quite pleasant to begin with but when the path entered woods it became patch after patch of wet, slimy mud, often sloping and really awkward. Just when the end was near and I wanted to crack on it was extremely laborious, in contrast, the normal finish is along an easy cycle path. Still, it was preferable to running along the verge of the busy road between Dalston and Carlisle. With 4km to go, I rejoined the normal route. I ran, walked and sat my way to the Tourist Information office, finishing just after 6pm.

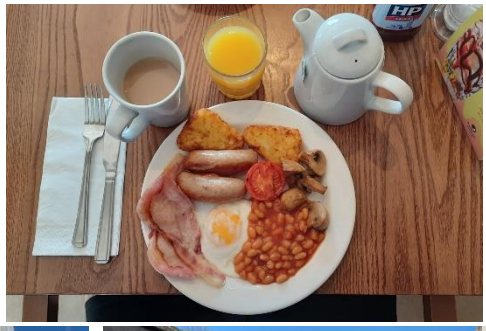
A couple of photos then down to meet John. We stopped in Dalston where he kindly went into the chippy and got me steak pie and chips, which I'd been dreaming about for several hours! I hadn't consumed any food or water for over 12 hours, but it's funny how after having stopped for 10 minutes I can eat again without feeling sick. The following morning pains in my legs woke me up early, depriving me of a lie in. On the second night my feet got their revenge by hurting even when I was lying down! I had a few blisters which took a couple of days of draining before they stopped refilling.


Lake District National Park














THE GILL







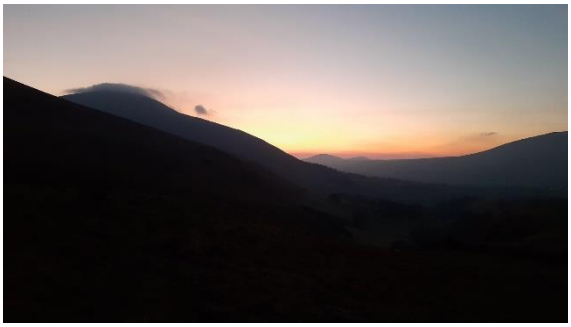


























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