Frog Graham Round Report – Chris Draper

Just over 40 Lakeland miles and around 3.5km of swimming across four lakes, which I completed on the 6th July 2019 in 17 hours 38 mins.



I'd been preparing for this all year, and the 6th July was the day I had pencilled in to do it. So at the beginning of the week I was psyched, but then after 3 months of behaving itself, the plantar fasciitis in my foot started flaring up..... bugger. The next opportunity I would have in our busy calendar might not be until we get back off holiday in August, and a week of eating Cornish pasties and drinking cider would not be the best preparation. So, I began a week long campaign against the PF of sitting at work without my shoe and sock on, rolling my foot on a frozen bottle under my desk, and lathering it in Ibuprofen gel. By Thursday night it was still painful and felt worse after a gentle jog round the block, but I made the decision to start anyway and see how it went.

My intention was to do what I called a 'technically unsupported' round with my wife observing my swims to ensure I was in and out the lakes safely, and maybe a couple of mates running along on the odd leg for company. In the end however a couple bits of help I had were vital, which I'll go on to highlight later. I'm happy though that I completed the round in the spirit of the challenge.

So, I set off for Keswick at around 3:30am in the morning with my wife Becca and father-in-law, and on route we stashed my 2nd wetsuit at Beck Wythop that I was switching to after the Bassenthwaite swim to avoid the cross contamination of invasive algae species into the pristine lakes of Crummock and Buttermere.

I set off from Moot Hall at 4am and having had ½ can of Deep Freeze deployed, once I got going my foot amazingly felt fine. Becca kept it that way for the rest of day with more Deep Freeze, Ibuprofen gel and paracetamol at various transitions (vital help #1).

I'd set myself an aspirational schedule of 16 hrs. I took leg 1 steady. The cloud base was low and there was some wind (as always) over Skiddaw, which made it a bit cold and wet, but I was at Church Bay, Bassenthwaite with 5 or 10 mins to spare.







Becca was waiting to maintain my foot and squeeze me into my full length wetsuit, along with Paul Arts, who'd showed up to accompany me on his paddle board. The swim went well but there was still a stiff wind and my GPS trace shows an inadvertent arc rather than the straight line I was trying to swim in. Before I knew it though we were at Beck Wythop. So far so good, but as I sat on the beach and tried to pull my wetsuit off, both my calves instantly cramped,really severely. Paul initially looked shocked as I lay on my back writhing in agony asking him to push my feet back, but he jumped into action and helped sort me out(vital help #2). Now, I had only asked Paul to accompany me on the Derwent swim, because there is no line of site across the whole swim from either side due to the length and islands in the middle, but during the week he had said he would meet me for the other swims too. Had he not been there I might possibly still be lying on that beach with my wetsuit round my ankles unable to move with my blood curdling screams drowned out by the cars on the A66
above. I've suffered from bad cramps in the past and wouldn't have been surprised if it had happened later in the day, but why it occurred so early on fresh legs after an easy start, is a mystery to me.



It took a good 10 mins or more to even get stood up, during which I thought it was game over before I'd even started leg 2. However, Paul convinced me I had plenty of time and told me to crack on and take it steady and it'd all be OK. I was far from convinced, and I set off with my 10 minute lead turned into 10 minutes behind, big knots in my calvesand moving slowly, with the thought of cramping up in the middle of a lake worrying me. I decided from there on in I would use a pull buoy (one of the bits of kit I had in the support bag that I wasn't intending to use), not kick on the swimsand rest my legs. I accepted my 16 hour schedule was out the window and doubted I'd even get round.

As I settled into leg 2 which has great long runnable sections, my calves eased up, the cloud parted, the sun came out and my spirits lifted. As I descended Whiteless Pike, Mark Hopkins appeared to join me and we dropped down over Rannerdale Knots to meet Becca and Paul at a lovely sunny Crummock. Mark continued with me on the swim as Paul paddled beside us taking some great photos.

My spirits were soon again to be subdued however, as leg 3 starts with a brutal and relentlessly steep ascent from the lake to the summit of Melbreak, made harder by waist high bracken that wasn't an issue on my previous recce's weeks earlier. Leg 3 is certainly the psychological crux – the shortest, but with steep, rough and little runnable ground. But, when you finally get down to Buttermere you are blessed with a short swim across the pristine beautiful lake.The sun was still shining and I knew that I only had one major climb left.

As I climbed out of Buttermere, Becca was sat in the sunshine waiting with my friend Richard, who as promised had driven all the way from Ashbourne in Derbyshire to have a run with me. Shooting the breeze made the steep ascent up Robinson seem easier than I thought it would be, and from there on in it's a long way but really runnable and all downhill (almost).



I arrived at Hawes End with Becca and Paul waiting again. I was really tired by now but set off with Paul for a glorious sunny evening swim across Derwent to be greeted at Calfclose Bay by my soon to be 10 year old daughter Louisa (delivered by my in-laws), who couldn't wait to run back into Keswick with me in her Cumberland Fell Runnersvest.

We arrived back at Moot Hall to cheers from my small crowd of helpers,and also by pure coincidence Martyn Price, the secretary of the Frog Graham Club who was out supporting a BG attempt.

I set off at 4am and got back at 9:38pm -17 hours and 38 mins. What a fantastic day.

Other Support Details -

My hydration strategy was to simply refill my bladder at natural water sources. I was however advised to drink ½ a bottle of flat Coke after each swim to kill any bugs I might swallow in the lake water, as apparently numerous people had been sick during the Lakesman event a few weeks earlier. I didn't want to add another kilo of weight to my pack at the start of the day, but as I only considered this necessary for health reasons,I believed it to be within the spirit to leave the Coke in my support bag. I also have to admit to taking a drink of water from a bottle Paul was carrying when I stopped at RampsholmeIsland during the long Derwent swim as my water was in packed up in my sack that I was towing.



I carried all my food from the start but left the rubbish and whatever I hadn't got through on each leg with my support.



Strava link - https://www.strava.com/activities/2510003827