Frog Graham round

James McLaughlin

August 15th 2023



Since I first read about the Frog in the pages of Fellrunner I have been intrigued and fascinated. As a lapsed triathlete and wannabee fell runner living in Oxfordshire I wondered if I was ever going to be up to the challenge because although I was running more than ever, I had let the swimming lapse and my navigation was far from good enough. To address the latter, I undertook a navigation for Runners course with Joe Faulkner and the team at Nav 4 which was great although sadly it was the weekend before lockdown #1 in March 2020 so the chance to properly practice soon disappeared.

As soon as things started to get back to normal Michelle and I decided it was the time for our much-wanted relocation to Cumbria, so our house went on the market and in January 2022 we were settling into our new home. Suddenly swims in the Lakes became a weekly occurrence and I started to get out in the fells more often than the infrequent trips up the M6 had allowed in the past. In some ways the confidence started to rise as I became fitter and got to know the fells better and I started to think maybe…. But at other times all it did was make me realise what I didn't know and how big a challenge it really was.

Joining Cumberland Fell Runners was a definite turning point as I started to run regularly with people who had done this and other similar challenges and realised they were "normal." I began openly talking about the Round on club runs or driving to races and everyone was very encouraging and supportive. I also realised though that I wanted to do it in as minimal a way as I thought possible at my level. My initial plan was to try and do it entirely solo and unsupported, but I quickly realised after a few recces than I would struggle without at least some support at certain points to provide fluids, food and perhaps wetsuit changes. Luckily, I have an incredibly supportive wife Michelle who wanted to be involved and who agreed to help when I was ready.

In July I completed my 3rd Lakeland 100 in a best time of 28:50 which gave me a real boost to my confidence, and I started to seriously think when rather than if.

While walking the week prior Michelle asked me what I was waiting for and apart from a good weather day I didn't really have an answer so when the forecast for Wednesday 15th was dry with little wind and not too hot, I finally committed and started packing gear etc.

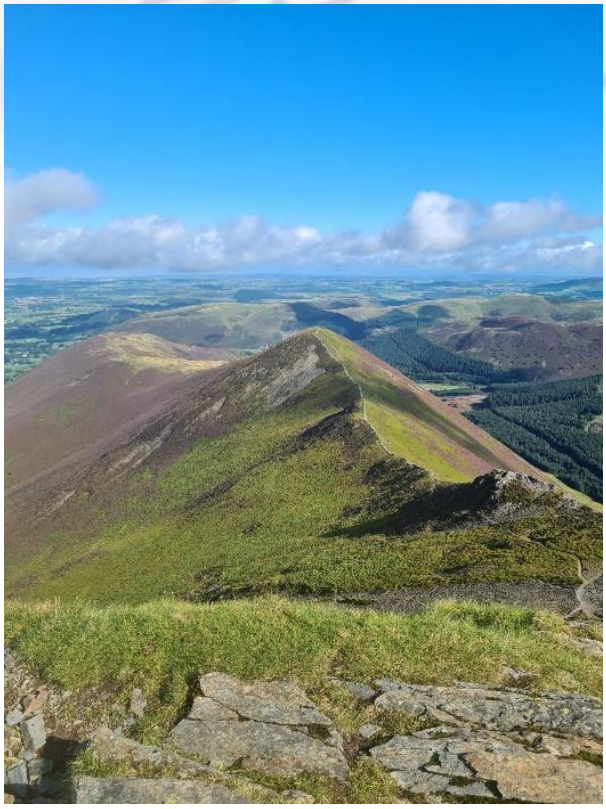


On Wednesday morning, after a disrupted sleep I ate my porridge before driving to Keswick. I had planned to start at 4.30 but stood at the door of the Moot Hall buzzing with pent up energy at 4.24 I set off towards Skiddaw in the dark. As I started the climb up from Latrigg the first light of what promised to be a stunning day appeared while behind me there was a thick mist over Derwent Water. I started praying that Bassenthwaite wouldn't be foggy as without support on the water I might struggle.



Skiddaw came and went without drama and before I knew it, I was meeting Michelle at Dodd carpark to put my wetsuit on then running via the Church (remembering to touch the wall!) and on to the Lake for Swim #1. There was mist on the water but if I lifted my head, I could see the vehicle lights on A66 to sight on until I was about halfway, at which point I could see the buoy near Beck Wythop and aimed for the exit. It was a beautiful swim in the early morning sunshine.

Michelle was waiting to top up water bottles and take my wetsuit home as I would be using a different suit for the other swims for biosecurity reasons. Soon I was off towards Barf. I have mixed memories of Barf having gone the craggy route with my dogs by mistake on one occasion resulting in much swearing and sweating. This time it was relatively straightforward, and I was soon off towards Lord's Seat and Whinlatter. The climb up Grisedale Pike felt like it went on forever, but the views were stunning, and I still hadn't seen another soul apart from Michelle since setting off.



I know the next fells reasonably well and enjoyed a jog across to Rannerdale trying to remember to keep eating and drinking (I must learn to concentrate while eating though as the few minor nav errors I made in the day were all while munching food.) Rannerdale was busy with walkers which felt a bit of a culture shock and I was glad to meet Michelle with our dog Danny and more food and wetsuit. Michelle hasn't crewed for me before and I think she was horrified to see how quickly I could eat pizza slices, chocolate and custard all washed down with loads of Coke.



The swim across Crummock Water was a refreshing change from the warmth of the day's running although looking back at the Strava trace I think my straight-line swimming needs some work. I half expected to see the fighter pilots overhead but the

closest I got was someone flying a drone from Low Ling Crag.

I had been dreading Mellbreak after recceing it a while back and struggling through the bracken. I decided to just get up whatever way I could and not get too stressed. I was also worrying about not tagging the South Summit properly so I tagged every point I could just in case.

I enjoyed the relative shade up along Scale Beck where I also washed out my wetsuit and kit to prevent any spread from Crummock into Buttermere. I was glad of the cold water to cool down and top up my water supplies as by now it was warmer than it had been for weeks, and this Irish bloke doesn't do brilliantly in the sun. Before too long (time is relative, isn't it?) I was heading down towards Horse Close woods and Buttermere. A lady who had just been swimming asked me what I was up to and when I explained my day so far and what lay ahead, she said "Oh, you still have a long way to go!" which made me hope she isn't a motivational speaker by profession.



I absolutely loved the clear, cool swim across Buttermere and almost didn't want to get out, but Michelle was waiting with food and drink supplies. My calves cramped badly getting out of my wetsuit resulting in some blue air on the beach before more greedy gorging on pizza, custard and coke to fuel up for the next "run".

There were some boy racers driving along the road by the Lake and I was glad to get back up into the fells and to see the familiar summits of Robinson, Dale Head and then High Spy.

I walked a lot, ran when I could and gradually started thinking maybe I was going to do this, if a bit slower than I might have hoped for. By now all I wanted was to be across Derwent Water before dark and soon I was looking down on the water and dreaming of finishing.



Michelle helped me get changed at Otterbield Bay and then she drove around to town to meet me as I headed for the intimidating gulls of Otterbield Island (I was very pleased they took off as I walked out of the water although I am sure they were dive bombing me after!) The lake was calm although choppier than the other 3 swims and before long I had passed the campers on St Herbert's Island



and the paddleboarders on Rampsholme Island and stepped ashore at Calf Close Bay. I wanted to waste no more time, so I rolled the wetsuit top down and began to run towards the Moot Hall. I am sure it must have been moved as it never seemed so far in the past.

I charged past the people enjoying a drink at the pubs and touched the wall at the Moot Hall 15hours and 59 minutes after I started.



I was exhausted but exhilarated and am so glad I had a go and got around. I would recommend it to anyone but couldn't have done it without Michelle's help. I was very careful to follow all biosecurity advice and hope my round was within the spirit of the FGR Club.

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