Race Report – Abraham's Tea Round
Sam Holding

05:00 – Alarm makes it usual declaration. Spend the following 40 seconds imagining various weather scenarios outside, beyond the closed blinds. A murmuring wind stimulates a sense of foreboding. Accept the day has begun; stumble towards the bathroom.

05:03 – Commence Brushing of teeth and catch the whisper of a chill on a slightly damp back of the neck from an overly humid night. Morale remains in question.

06:30 – Arrive at Keswick. Paul Simon and occasional breaks in the cloud during the journey have raised spirits into positive figures. Jog to George Fisher's in a stable and calm state.

06:59 – Prepare the position: left hand touching the door, right hand hovering over GPS watch, watching the countdown, *"I passed bin men collecting in near the Moothall, might I now find them at an unfortunate choke point?"* No time remains to address such concerns.

07:00 – Spring off on the ball of the right foot, *"So it begins"*.

07:03 – Underway. It's now a decidedly pleasant morning in Keswick. Down the main street, trying to assign words to that positive feeling of being somewhere that you're accustomed to being very busy, but you now find perfectly still, failing, then simply enjoying it. Over the bridge and attempt to enter the rugby field rather than the adjacent track, *"We really shouldn't be going wrong already"*. A nice jaunt along the track, into Portinscale, through the woods surrounding Lingholm, *"I ought to come here more often"* (some concern being given to the fact I am sweating profusely... at a slow pace... on the flat).

07:30 – 1/3 of the way up Catbells, *"Oh dear"*, 500ft into 12,000 and I'm cursing my lack of climbing over the previous weeks, *"This was rash, very rash"* I rein-in any additional effort I might wish to apply and reach the summit slowly but in a steady and unbroken state.

08:00 – Down the back of Catbells, first taste of downhill, I'm lighter than air, *"I could literally run forever. What did I fear earlier?"* A slightly older self (roughly 2 hours) reflects on this jovial, care-free character with scorn and no small amount of longing, but his time in this tale is not yet.

08:30 – Valley floor, past Little Town and for one of the very rare sections of flat I will find today. The rhythm of my footfall strikes up 'Green Onions' in my head. Morale remains high during the climb up onto the Northern spur of Robinson, followed by an exceedingly pleasant run along said spur. I'm forced to stop and draw a deep draught of the view. A steady trudge up the remainder of Robinson, trying to get the first rice cake down. All is well.

09:30 – Robinson summit. Bit blowy on the top, but nothing substantial. *"Right, let's attack this descent, we'll be at the lakeshore in seconds..."*, begin to pick up the pace... excitement is building (I didn't recce this...) glorious visions of myself hurtling towards the water at 4min/miles, with a 45 degree forward lean on, are alive in my mind...

09:34 – Grinding to a halt, *"I need to be over there"*, gets going again, *"This is shoddy ground... maybe it'll be OK after the heather..."*

10:15 – It wasn't. Dreadful going from start to finish, 'lowering myself down by hand' sort of ground. *"This is disastrous, 14 mins/miles downhill is not OK"*. From halfway down Robinson till the end of Barrow I was largely internally numb; notably missing the internal monologue I commonly play out when alone on such runs.

I started to grow concerned about time on that decent as it was taking >2x longer than I'd imagined and reached the valley floor in a slightly rattled state. Time was playing on my mind and my legs were already starting to feel the fatigue (running on the flat rarely requires effort at that pace and I wasn't yet halfway).

I stayed sensible throughout the climb up High Stile (no longer through choice), but it felt like it took a long, long time. No sense of elation accompanied the summit before plodding over to Red Pike to begin another painfully slow descent; no longer having the strength in my legs to attack to the first part, to the tarn, and if you've been that way, you'll know the steps for the remainder do not make for good running.

Valley floor again. Even the egotistical surge that normally accompanies passing folk had fled the scene and the pace stayed very sedate. I'd been weighing up the idea of stopping at the cafe to buy another Lucozade, I'd been draining the 1L of it and 1.5L of water I'd been carrying at a far greater rate than anticipated, having sweat like a saturated and then slowly squeezed sponge from Lingholm. But, as this would no longer mean an unsupported round (and the queue was out of the door), I binned the idea and pushed on.

Through the woods, up onto Whiteless and the Lesser Spotted Common Cramp Beast alights on my legs, sinking its teeth in for a rare feast. I hobble up Wandope after another excruciatingly time consuming climb and push swiftly on, onto the track and towards Hopegill Head. The worst is now definitely over, spirits are on the rise again, internal commentary is resumed.

A relatively spritely tour of Hopegill and Grisedale Pike precedes an accepted, slow climb up Eel Crag. It starts to rain slightly so I pause to take out the jacket, everything is feeling very slow now, time is almost beyond consideration.

On reflection; had I been taking this as a fairly leisurely day out, I would've been prepared enough (training mileage-wise), but I was really quite far short of the more aggressive pace I had planned. I'm confident of achieving a much more competitive time in 2019.

Onwards; Crag Hill and down the zig-zag path, *"eyesore or friend? I'm musing again, things can't be so bad"*. Causey and down to Rowling End (feeling bitter about this double-back necessity). I'd planned a more direct line across to Barrow, rather than fully descending to the crossing. This was an error, if you do the round, just take the track and save yourself a fight that you really don't need (might be better in winter). {EDIT – Having comprehensively compared the two after writing this report, I can confirm it is definitely quicker to take the more direct line, I'd just dropped down too early}.

Finally ascending Barrow, last Mars bar unwrapped. And down, slowly, very slowly, before elation at the gate *"Tea Round accomplished… effectively"*. Around 3 miles back from the foot of Barrow and the most effort I've ever put into picking my legs up for a flat 3 miles, willing myself to finish at a decent pace; another departure from how I'd imagined the triumphant run back in (thoughts are

weightless, tired legs aren't). Through the crowds, up the main street and to the door, both hands touch the wood before the right searches for the watch; accuracy seems less important than it did at 06:59.

30.5 miles, 12,000ft climb, 7hrs 27min 40secs