I was under no illusion the Joss Naylor Lakeland Challenge time allowance of 12 hours for a V50 would be easy. I had used the 10 Peaks race a month earlier as a test, it has similar ascent to the JNLC but is around three miles longer, it took over 14 hours so there was no doubt this was race pace for me. I thought running with support would make up some of the difference and I did lose time on the 10 Peaks because I ran out of water?

The JNLC time for V50 is the equivalent of running a sub 6 hour Wasdale fell race twice and last year I did Wasdale in 6:05. **Think positive!**

Leg 1 – Pooley Bridge to Kirkstone Pass

At 7:00am on a glorious sunny morning I set off from Pooley Bridge with Paul Johnson providing support. The low cloud forecast had not materialised so I could relax and enjoy the run up to Arthur's Pike. I had told Paul I thought the schedule was too fast and would be walking a lot of the climb so I was very surprised to hit the summit bang on time!

Stuart Stoddart was waiting on the top and joined us providing some local knowledge and entertainment when he tried to nose dive into one of the many bogs. It was heavy going until High Raise due to the amount of rain the previous week but we kept pretty much to the schedule. We said goodbye to Stuart at Rampsgill Head and within 30 seconds I took a nose dive myself, no damage done but a warning I needed to concentrate.

By now the day was heating up and on the climb up to Stony Cove Pike I was starting to feel it. I don't appreciate running in hot weather especially as at the pace we were moving it was getting difficult to drink enough water. Paul had been doing a fantastic job providing food and drink when I needed it but my body was having difficulty taking it in. On the final descent Paul still had the energy to race off and warn my road support I was on my way.

Leg 2 – Kirkstone Pass to Dunmail Raise

A big grin for my daughter Rebecca taking photos at Kirkstone a quick guzzle of juice and water then I pour half of it over my wife handing the bottle back.

"Sorry!"

Great to see one of the official JNLC helpers turn out to see me at Kirkstone, it is a lovely tradition that I was not expecting. Only five minutes down on schedule here but I don't stop and get the time back. Paul Jennings is supporting this leg and I immediately tell him I am taking the climb easy as I need to eat and hydrate before pushing again. The descent off Red Screes becomes very wet approaching Scandale Pass and some of the shortcuts I take don't seem worth it as I sink deep into bogs forcing me to walk.

It feels very hot on the climb around Dove Crag and I'm constantly drinking, I thought I had given Paul too much water to carry at the start of the leg but on Hart Crag I finish the last of my water. The views are spectacular running towards Fairfield, the bright greens of the Eastern Fells especially looked magnificent, what a day to be on the fells! We run straight past the summit to a cairn further north, I blame the fact that I'm normally here in the dark or in clag or both! This resulted in a great descent line on grass to join the main path so may have been worth it.

The final descent to the road through the bracken from Seat Sandal was one mudslide, not sure how I kept on my feet. We arrived thirsty but confident 10 minutes behind schedule at Dunmail.

Leg 3 – Dunmail to Styhead Pass

Wynn and Steve Cliff were at Dunmail supporting and it was a real boost to see them both, this was why I was doing this challenge. I drank as much liquid as my stomach could hold then set off up Steel Fell eating a bacon sarnie with Carwyn Phillips and Andy Beaty on support duty.

The climb seemed to take ages and once on the top I struggled to run some of the flatter sections then managed to find the deepest of the bogs going in up to my thigh as Andy floated across like Legolas. All this was very heavy going and I could feel time draining away.

On the tussocky climb up to High Raise it was getting increasingly hard to eat as my mouth was dry no matter how much water I was drinking, luckily Carwyn had some jelly babies which I managed to get down or the time deficit may have become too much. Every time we passed a stream I would have a hat of water poured over me and soaked my bandana to try and cool down. I was feeling queasy and lightheaded on the climb to Bowfell, at the summit, after finding that I'd lost over 30 mins since leaving Dunmail I knew things would have to change.

On the climb to Esk Pike I started taking a small bite from a bar then wash it down with water as if taking tablets, doing this I managed to eat a full bar before the summit! I used the same tactic on the climb to Great End. I was still

losing time but I was now getting calories in before the final leg. More importantly I could see cloud creeping in from the west, soon that sun would be hidden. I now started to perk up as I was also approaching home ground and descended Great End in the scheduled time.

Leg 4 – Styhead to Greendale Bridge

It was lovely to see Kate Beaty here who had come out to Styhead to see how I was getting on, again it's a little boost to know people are cheering you on when attempting challenges like this. A quick look at the watch confirmed I was 42 minutes behind the schedule so it would require a 3:35 last leg, 20 minutes faster than 12 hour pace to finish in time. The temperature had dropped by about 10 degrees, the wind had picked up, thick cloud was shrouding the tops and all I could think of was yes let's do it!

Phil Archer and Peter Mcavoy were my support for the final leg. No mention was made of the time but the atmosphere was serious and I could tell they were keen to be off. I had told them I was going to run straight through but I knew I needed to get more food and water in so took four minutes to wash down another bar before setting off. A steady ascent of Gable followed taking in plenty of water and a gel halfway up, we quickly gained on a walker but could never quite catch him. At the summit he gleefully explained he was not going to let us overtake!

"Gained 4 minutes"

I could see Phil stopping to take a bearing off the misty summit but these are the fells I've spent most of my life running over so I ran straight him past down my preferred route, the rocks were extremely slippy but I was starting to feel in my element now and made it down to Beck Head in 10 minutes. Another gel on the ascent of Kirk Fell then the rain gets heavier so my waterproof top goes on and I shelter behind Peter due to the strong gusts of wind.

"Gained another 9 minutes"

Food and drink appear within seconds of requesting it all I've got to do is run, this is great fun! I shout follow me after the summit and snake through the scree and crags to the top of Red Gully. This is a section I was worried about as my legs are starting to cramp and any big stretch down could set it off, I take it slowly and manage to make it down without incident. It's a long drag up to Pillar and I still need to gain time so run a lot of the uphills and power walk the steep sections.

"5 minutes gained"

I run off Pillar into the clag navigating from feature to feature to drop quickly down to wind gap and skip along the Black Crag traverse. The oil slick rocks of Scoat are slowly crossed and likewise the out and back to Steeple before striding out into the wind and rain on the grassy descent before Haycock.

Sheltered slightly from the weather I take it easy on the climb and take in more food and water, at the summit I start running towards the descent gully then...

"ARGH!"

I caught a rock with my foot and now I'm sprawled on the ground near the summit of Haycock with blood pouring from my hand and my left calf going into painful spasms of cramp. A quick stretch and the cramp eases but it's a very tentative descent down the steep slopes before confidence comes back and I pick up the pace again. Just before the climb to Seatallan Phil goes by at a sprint, no way can I move at that pace, he's got the last gel so is this some sort of ploy where I have to catch him if I want it! He stops after the climb starts but I run straight by and keep going until the slope gets too steep and I have to walk, he soon catches up with me.

"What time is it"

I have not looked at my watch as I'm going as fast as I can, I'm not sure I want to know.

"It's six o'clock"

"The schedule is 45 mins from Seatallan"

I'm not sure how long until the summit so keep pushing, at 18:15 we reach it but the clag is down and this can be a tricky top to find the way off. Phil has his compass out and runs off on a bearing, for the first time I follow glad of the help as this is a summit I rarely visit. I soon see tracks that look familiar further north and follow these keeping Phil in sight to judge my direction. I drop down steeply beside a scree run within 30 seconds the clag parts to reveal Middle Fell ahead and for the first time on this leg I relax.

I run a lot of the climb up Middle Fell for fun and then slowly jog down from the summit remembering the times I have ran this descent with friends on their challenges to finish at Greendale Bridge in 11:54. A handshake and good

crack with Joss on the bridge then a wash in the beck before reminiscing with Steve and Wynn for a few hours on present and past adventures.

Happy Days!








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