Kate Charles JNC (W55) 24 July 2026

I had been planning and reccying bits of the JNC on and off for about six years before I finally felt the right moment had come for an attempt. Various hiatuses related to menopause and injuries meant that my 55th birthday passed and went with no date set.

But it was when Paul Jennings announced his date for the 17 August this year that I suddenly felt that the time had come to get on with it. Paul and I completed our Bob Graham Rounds on the same day in 2008 (we went in opposite directions, and crossed at Wasdale). I had been feeling quite fit recently and done a few races. The dry spells of weather in June and July meant good conditions underfoot but I daren't risk going on a super hot day as I'm not good in the heat. Although it was my successful completion of the shortened-due-to-the-heat Wasdale race on 11 July that finally convinced me that I could keep going even in difficult conditions and on the day after that race I messaged on the CFR WhatsApp group for support for an attempt on Sunday 26th July. At least I would only have two weeks to worry about it!

It soon became apparent that very many of my potential helpers were otherwise engaged in the Lakeland 50 or 100, or on holiday, but I managed to get together a small team. I always intended to have only one pacer on each leg as I knew the route quite well, but even so, getting a full team was touch and go. This wasn't helped by me subsequently changing the date from the Sunday to the Friday as I really did not want to go in the rain, and the Friday 24th looked like the last dry day. As it happens, this was the same decision made by Katharina Hartmuth for her BGR Record breaking attempt.

Although carrying a few niggles, I felt pretty confident that I was fit enough to get round in the allowed 16 hours. I'd been able to build my schedule based on my multiple reccy times and with the hindsight provided by Graham Watson's schedule and actuals from his attempt on which I helped on my 50th Birthday back in 2019, and came up with 15h10.

My first leg pacer was the legend that is Steve Birkinshaw, and we travelled to the start together in his car, early on Friday morning. I'd decided to go 'early' at 3am as I'm a morning person, and also if it was to be hot then I'd get more done in the cool of night. As it happened it was actually quite cool indeed at times, and in fact proved to be the perfect temperature for me all day. I'd collected my tracker from Kong the night before, as I wasn't sure my second hand Garmin watch would last the required 16 hours, and also that we'd found the tracker information really useful when pacing a BG leg the previous weekend. So I reached the bridge and pressed the button. In the dark it was easy to see the lights flashing and we checked on Steve's phone that it was working.

An easy jog along the footpath and through the lakeside parts of the Park Foot campsite, familiar from previous triathlons, scattering baby rabbits in our torch lights and feeling a welcome breeze. We debated whether we should really be running up the first hill and then settled into a steady walk up through the top of the campsite and out onto the fell. I was nervous about the first split as that was going to tell me a lot about whether my schedule was good or not but we reached Arthur's Pike two minutes ahead. Phew.

Somewhere in the darkness, we heard a Curlew calling, which was very poignant as my chosen charity was to be Curlew Action 😊. There was a bit of mist around on the tops but not enough to seriously impede progress and the sky was brightening behind us all the time. It was light enough to switch off head torches somewhere around Red Crag. A bit more fine mist on High Street and then the relief of some rocky ups and downs, my legs weren't really used to the 8 miles of more or less continuous running on the early part of Leg 1!

Steve took a new line to Stony Cove Pike summit which avoided the confusion of all the walls, which I noted for future. Broad daylight now and we soon spotted the big white motorhomes at Kirkstone pass, and no doubt our support vehicles and taxis too. Pike How (why?) and the messy descent across the slopes of St Raven's Edge were crossed without too much bother and I sent Steve ahead to order tea and cake for me.

Paul Jennings, my Leg 2 runner, was waiting out on the road to show me the gate into the car park, so I mentally ticked off another part of the plan as complete. All the wheels seemed to be in motion. Charles, my 'Kirkstone Taxi man' stood by quietly while my kit was exchanged between pacers and chitties signed up. Everyone seemed delighted that I'd arrived bang on schedule 😊. Although the fruit cake was very nice, I couldn't finish it as I'd been having stomach problems most of the way along Leg 1, which was unusual for me. Anyway I'd managed to keep drinking and eating jelly babies, apricots and mint cake so I didn't worry too much. We headed up the rocky path of Red Screes and arrived at the top again close to schedule. The usually very boggy bottom of Scandale Pass was only slightly boggy and I was relieved to get across with mostly dry feet. My biggest worry about the whole attempt was that the tape I had applied to support my plantar faciitis on my right foot would get wet and come off, and that I wouldn't be able to get another lot to stick. So I had applied the tape the evening before and was wearing waterproof socks.

We climbed quickly up to the wall before Dove Crag and soon found the traverse path round the back. This was always my favourite little section of the route. It was misty on Hart Crag and also Fairfield but Paul found the racing lines. It was actually quite cold but I didn't quite need my waterproof. It cleared coming off Fairfield and was fine for Seat Sandal. Spotting the cars at Dunmail again lifted my spirits and we made good time on that leg. Dunmail was busy with vans waiting for runners, apparently Charmian was waiting for Katharina but I didn't realise at the time. This time I managed to drink a bottle of milkshake and eat a couple of pancakes. I changed my socks and top (thanks Barbara) and the tape was still stuck well in position. I collected my poles and set off over the stile with Dave Spain. Though this was his first time pacing on a JNC (or even a BG for that matter), Dave was a great companion and chatted cheerily all the way across what always feels like the wilderness leg, between Dunmail and Wasdale, tho only to Sty Head this time. The tussocky slog up on to High Raise was no better than usual and I flagged a bit. But Dave found the JNC path to Sticks Pass easily after the top and I enjoyed running along it, having never really reccied it properly. A good line onto Rosset eluded me as usual and I lost 9 minutes on that leg which was quite disappointing. It was misty again as we set off up the Bowfell traverse and again didn't find a convincing line, tho I know there are one or two. Finally we reached Bowfell in the mist and I was now 15 minutes behind and almost ready to admit defeat. My legs were OK but maybe I just wasn't fast enough. I decide I'd finish anyway, since everyone was now either out or on their way out to meet me, and that I'd just have to wait a few years until I was 60 and had more time.

As we climbed carefully off Bowfell summit, we spotted a diminutive female runner in shorts and a t-shirt dancing across the boulders towards us, accompanied by a pacer. I shouted 'Go Katharina' and she responded 'Oh Thankyou' with some surprise. She and her team soon flew past us and this inspired me to get on with it over the misty Esk Pike and to Great End. Dave took me an unfamiliar line to the cairn and I got stroppy with him for taking me to the wrong summit. It was cold now and I was pretty fed up at getting behind but I checked our position on my phone and grabbed his map to take a bearing. We were, of course in exactly the right place so I stepped confidently over the edge and scrambled across the boulders. I quickly spotted my landmark of a low wall made of yellow ish stones and the small cairns. Soon I could see Sty Head below and I knew I'd have a full team waiting which included Wendy Dodds, and I plummeted down the nose of Great End, leaving Dave to log my time and find his own way. He didn't catch me till we were almost down but we had both been impressed with my turn of speed. I arrived only a couple of minutes behind schedule at Sty Head and knew that all being well it was in the bag. I had 50 minutes contingency in my schedule and now had a bombproof navigator and experienced pacer in my husband, John Slater, and a fit and cheery 'bag carrier' in Dan Wilson, also a novice pacer but a complete gentleman and very attentive. There was quite a crowd at Sty Head. John had arrived from Wasdale, Graham Watson had brought Pete and Dan and some water and food up from Seathwaite and Wendy had arrived by another route (Honister I think). Loads of people attended to my needs and we were quickly off for the climb up Gable.

Wendy took photos at the top and then descended back to her car and a FRCC engagement. John announced that I'd climbed strongly and made good time up Gable and now that the rain was off he was feeling very confident we'd make it. Kirkfell came and went without drama and

on the long climb up Pillar we met Katharina and one pacer again, this time coming towards us at breakneck speed, in fact so quickly that she'd dropped her second pacer who we met some time later getting her map and compass out. I wished her luck again, with much more gusto than last time as I was motoring pretty well myself now and the end was literally in sight.

Pillar is always the last big climb, whether it's a round or a race and it was a relief to get it done. 'All downhill from here' 😊 Scoat and Steeple were ticked off and even John started to take summit photos so I knew he was relaxed about my progress. We took the grassy line off Haycock and trotted across the bog to Seatallan. At the bottom we passed a cheery family group who commented 'here's someone in a hurry to get to the pub', and I mused to myself that actually I'd been in quite a hurry since 3am that morning. Now the sun was finally properly out and it was a beautiful late afternoon. Apart from some serious chafing between my legs, nothing was actually giving me too much bother and we had celebratory photos on Middle Fell in the evening sun. Good lines were found through the bracken and we arrived jubilantly at the bridge at 7 minutes past 6. Total time 15h07. Job done.