Lakes in a Day Route – 84km, 3900m ascent, 19h55m, solo and unsupported

(Sat 1st – Sun 2nd April 2023)

When cataloguing the long-distance routes in the Lake District I noticed that two paralleled each other quite closely – the route of the Lakes in a Day race that begins in Caldbeck to the north of the Skiddaw massif and terminates in Cartmel, about 3km from the southern coast of Cumbria, and the Cumbria Way with begins in Ulverston, birth place of Stan Laurel, and finishes in the centre of Carlisle, county town of Cumbria. The two routes are mostly about 5-10km apart, except for coinciding at High Pike and the route between its summit and Caldbeck. I thought it would be interesting to go down the Lakes by the former and return via the latter. Rather than taking camping equipment, I would stay in a hotel to keep my pack weight down and hopefully move a bit faster. Having done several long routes over the past few months I decided it was time to have a go. I waited until the forecast was for several dry, overcast days (I'm not a great fan of heat and sunshine) and booked the Premier Inn in Ulverston. However, as departure approached the forecast changed to clear skies and sunshine – I must have been the only person in Cumbria to be disappointed!

A week before the off I'd raced and then applied my usual tapering regime in preparation for such efforts: no exercise whatsoever and laying down extra fat. On Saturday evening, I drove over to a friend's house in Caldbeck which is only metres away from the beginning of the Lakes in a Day route. I ate tea and enjoyed some TV, trying not to get too comfortable. I eventually departed into the night at 10:05pm, 5 minutes late because I'd been umming and ahing about which shoes to wear; I eventually decided on my usual fell shoes. I usually Compeed and tape my big toe bones but decided to experiment with not doing so. My rucksack weighed a little over 4kg (excluding water). I was rather disappointed it was so high but once I added duvet jacket, hat, gloves, spare torch battery, spare torch, bivi bag, first aid kit, food for two days, etc. the weight climbed inexorably. I'm always little concerned about being alone on a cold night especially when tired so carry a reasonable amount of warm clothing. It always seems a little incongruous when carrying it later on a hot day.

Climbing up High Pike I entered cloud and I was then running in bubble of back-scatter. It was nice to drop out of the cloud crossing the Caldew but I then climbed back into it ascending Mungrisedale Common. The ground became wetter and my feet began to get cold. I decided it was time to don fleece and windproof. No rain had been forecast, but windblown cloud definitely fees like rain. I hadn't looked at the map for a while and when I did, remarkably, I was already on the ascent of Atkinson Pike, probably the first time ever I have been further ahead than expected; I reached the summit of Blencathra 30 minutes ahead of schedule. The rocks of Hall's Fell Ridge were dripping wet and very slippy, which I quickly proved by sliding on a slab. Fortunately, it was such a big one that I landed squarely on my rucksack with no part of my body contacting the ground. I've done Hall's Fell Ridge many times, but usually in ascent and I like to scramble as close to the crest as possible, rather than any paths bypassing tricky bits, and surprisingly nothing looked familiar. I descended a shallow, rocky gully that was clearly a descent route but it was treacherous. Unfortunately, I failed to go left at its base and continued downwards. The slabby rocks became steeper, the grass between less and it eventually dawned on me I was dropping off the right-side of the ridge. I was in a precarious position and a slip could be fatal – I've always puzzled over how people could fall from Hall's Fell Ridge to their death but I now realized how easy it could happen. I had to traverse back to the path but even this proved tricky with little grass and few holds on the rock. The path remained rocky much of the way so was slow going and by the time I reached Threlkeld I'd lost the 30 minutes I'd gained. Despite this, the 4 hours from Caldbeck had passed by quite easily.

I hadn't been looking forward to the road section along the B5322, but at 2:30 in the morning I needn't have worried. As I ascended Clough Head the wind increased and I knew at some point I would have to stop and re-don fleece and windproof because I would be up high most of the time from now until the descent into Ambleside. As usual I put it off as long as possible, finally doing so just beyond Calfhow Pike, and then shivering for the following 20 minutes. Once warmed up again I was quite comfortable, despite still only wearing shorts! As I passed Sticks Pass, I thought of the over 200 runners doing the Lakes Traverse (including Alison Wright of CFR) and Northern Traverse the last of whom would have passed this way only a few hours earlier. My routes would never be as hard as those doing the Northern Traverse. Crossing Raise I noticed there was a glow in the gloom that wasn't just

backscatter from my torch – it was becoming light; I'd made it through the night. Passing over Helvellyn, the highest part of route, at the coldest time of the night probably wasn't the best planning but I made it with just a short stop in the shelter for old-times' sake. I had the summit to myself but only just, passing a couple of chaps ascending shortly after leaving the summit.

I reached Grisedale Tarn after 8h40m and stopped for food. It was now light but the cloud was still down to tarn level. On this route I decided to try something new: rather than a cold, dehydrated meal I'd brought a ready-to-eat meal together with flameless heater – a pouch containing a sealed bag of chemicals. I added water to initiate the exothermic reaction, put the pouch of food inside and laid it flat as instructed. Nothing happened. After 10 minutes, I gave up, took the food pouch out and began to eat it cold. I rolled up the outer pouch containing the bag of chemicals, popped it in a plastic rubbish bag, stowed it in the outer netting of my rucksack and began walking alongside the tarn whilst eating. Suddenly, I noticed I was being overtaken by steam blown on the wind. The reaction had started! I quickly whipped my sack off, worried that it might melt. Fortunately, only the rubbish bag was shrinking a little. I took out the very hot pouch and used it as a hand-warmer, which was delightful. I tried it down inside my fleece but had to take it out because it was too hot!

Up Fairfield, along the Pikes ridge, dropped out the cloud, Ambleside. I was a little concerned my legs felt worse than after completing the Cockermouth watershed. Also, because I'd not taped by big toe bones, I'd tied my shoes tightly to stop my feet slipping forwards, but this resulted in bruising the tops of my feet. To prevent one problem, I'd caused another. I had to slacken my shoes a few times from now on, probably as my feet swelled. Still, I was over half-way and had done three-quarters of the ascent so it shouldn't be a problem to complete the route.

After Ambleside, the route is composed of road, soil paths, tracks and fields. Friends who'd done the Lakes in a Day race said some runners change their footwear for the second 'half', but, of course, I didn't want to pay the weight penalty of carrying another pair of shoes. After the pleasant Moss Eccles Tarn, I dropped to Windermere's shore and could see down the remaining length of the lake – it looked an awfully long way! Even though I can always consult my watch to find out the distance remaining, I've realised I'd rather not be able to see it! It's very pleasant around High Dam, Finsthwaite and Summer House Knotts and it was now a gloriously sunny afternoon. When I first visited Summer House Knotts a few years ago I thought it would be greatly improved if some of the trees were felled, resulting in a fabulous view of Windermere. Storm Arwen gave it a very good go, but unfortunately missed the ones near the summit. Part of the route was blocked because of works clearing trees but I couldn't hear anything happening so pushed passed the fence.

Beyond Newby Bridge were green fields and very quiet lanes. My hip was hurting but even worse were my sore feet. Sore feet! What a feeble affliction. From the outside I probably didn't look much different, but internally I dreaded each step. I had to take every opportunity to sit down to give my feet some respite. From Ambleside, I could have worn more padded road shoes and regretted not bringing any to change in to. After nearly 20 hours, I reached the school in Cartmel. The gates were open so I went inside to simulate the end of the race.

My intention had been to walk the 3.5km to the station in Grange-over-Sands but that no longer appealed! Fortunately, very near the school is a pub, so I went in and enquired about the cost of a taxi. £7. That'll do. They even rang up for me. I passed the time away awaiting its arrival drinking coke and eating nuts. I was dropped in Grange outside a chippy, bought my tea then walked to the station whilst eating it. It was a pleasant train journey overlooking the sands and across the Leven Viaduct. The train passed the Premier Inn on the east side of Ulverston and continued to the station on the west side, the houses streaming by like a cartoon backdrop, as my heart sank more and more at the prospect of having to walk back. I fired up Google Maps which gave me the time until it would all be over. Fortuitously, it took me passed the house in which Stan Laurel was born, at least some reward for the walk.

The Premier Inn was a palace – a place of baths, beds and endless tea. I filled the toilet bowl with a large amount of soil by removing by shoes and socks over it. I had a bath and washed some clothes. I dried them using the hair dryer, causing it to cut out by stuffing it into a sock! My throat had been quite sore throughout the day, but I was in luck as downstairs there was a vending machine dispensing ice-creams; what joy – a Solero for supper!


Lake District
National
Park






















CARTMEL






Salty
Dog
















Ice cream time . . .
any time

