Becoming No.23 – Running the Lakes, Meres and Waters
Matt Le Voi

'F**K!* I shouted at the top of my voice. I think all of West Cumbria probably would have heard me as I bent double and put my hands on my knees. 'I didn't touch Wastwater!'. 'On this bloody run all I have to do is one bloody thing! Arrrrrghhhh'. Before I knew it I was retracing my steps back down the hill to dip my fingers in the water...

Here's my 105 mile tale of completing the Lakes, Meres and Waters...



At Loweswater, excited and probably overwhelmed.

On Saturday 6th August at 4:55am I was stood aside Loweswater. The moment had finally come for me to attempt the longest and hardest run (and challenge) of my life. The minutes ticked on by slowly, almost taunting me, encouraging me to just walk away before I got going. 5am, time to go.

My support for this first leg was Bill Williamson and Adam Anderson. We ran and chatted our way along the easy trails that follow the shore of Crummock Water and onto Buttermere. From Buttermere the first main climb presents itself - Red Pike! At this point in time I didn't feel great. Despite a 2 week taper, I had knee niggles presenting themselves - 'how am I meant to run 105 miles if I hurt now!?' I've climbed Red Pike enough times to know that if you just keep it steady the summit soon comes. I think so many get daunted by the steepness and try and push their way through it. We left the misty summit plateau and made our way day to the shores of Ennerdale Water. Adam broke off here, and myself and Bill then took the route to run the 6km up the valley to exit via Black Sail Pass, as opposed to the route over near Haycock. I had done a recce of this route, and a nice run out, I was glad I took the easier trails on this attempt.

On our way up Black Sail I started to pull away from Bill. He's a very experienced runner and has supported countless rounds, and so I thought he was playing a blinder of a placebo move here by letting me pull away. I arrived at the top of Black Sail, sat by a cairn and just took it all in. I had about 3-4 minutes of silence, time I savoured as stopping to sit on my Bob Graham Round was something I really didn't have the privilege to do. Bill arrived with laboured walk, and it actually transpired he had severe foot cramps. As we descended towards Wasdale it was clear he was in agony, especially when it spread to his calf. As we neared the valley bottom I pulled ahead to get set at the checkpoint, and gladly about 10 minutes after Bill arrived.



Climbing up Red Pike with Bill.



Saying bye to Adam at Ennerdale Water.



Chewing up miles with Sarah.

Kev, my support driver for the first third of the challenge was probably surprised to hear me feeling so negative about how I felt to this point. You wouldn't expect someone to get to the checkpoint saying they felt rubbish at this point, but he got me going and off I went onto Leg 2 with my new support runner, Sarah Wild . We trotted out of the National Trust car park and things were starting to feel a bit better with the legs. We made good progress up the easy slopes towards Burnmoor Tarn, and just as Wastwater was about to disappear out of sight it dawned on me - I never touched the water! Quite simply I'd been distracted, and it wasn't long into my run back down the hill that my anger of wasting time and energy was overcome by the fact that I was glad I had actually realised there and then. Can you imagine if I was another 10 miles in and I realised!? It's fair to say, any water at another checkpoint was touched before going to the road support!







Coniston Funtimes with Matt, Jonny and Tori.

We got through Eskdale and up to Devoke Water in good time, and then just stuck to the road down to Seathwaite. Again, I'd recce'd Joss' line across the side of Green Crag, but I opted for the slightly longer, but easier under foot option. We got into Seathwaite and it was time for my first Pot Noodle - a food that worked wonders for me on my BG. By this point I was also starting to feel much better in myself. The niggles had gone and the cloud in my mind had dissipated. With this being the longest run I'll have attempted, I think I was just so overwhelmed by the distance and time I couldn't start to relax until I had got some of the opening legs done.

I was now heading for Coniston, a leg that is not only super fun thanks to some nice lines to run, but also suits my strength - climbing mountains! I was joined on this leg by Matt Handley, Tori Miller and later on Jonny Wren. These guys were full of banter, and had bags and bags of awesome treats for me to chow down on. The timing of their inclusion on the challenge could not have worked better. We made light work of the Walna Scar Road and then traversed over to Goats Water. There were a few options for routes to Low Water here, and after a recent recce Matt had proposed we just go up and over the Old Man of Coniston. I was game for anything, especially after my route that traverses wasn't absolutely bomb proof. We tackled the steep slopes and before long we were dropping to Low Water weaving through all the hikers. The line from Low Water to Levers Water is a brilliant grassy terrace, almost designed for this route. Levers Water was dipped and we dropped down to Coniston.

It would now have been about 5pm ish and it was time to swap my support crew once more. Kev was swapping with Sara on road, and then I had Sharon Bianchi, Charlotte & Scott Logie joining me for the run to Ambleside. We followed my gpx up random trails and roads to Esthwaite Water for starters, and then it was a chunk of road miles to head into Elterwater. Shortly after, we were dipping in Grasmere and then Rydal Water. The quick succession of waters really helped make me feel like I was getting somewhere, and I was, I think I was now over half way! Good friend James Gibson joined us at Rydal and we all jogged into Ambleside.







My Super support for Leg 4. Bending over to touch Grasmere. Toe Tappin'.

The Ambleside checkpoint was perfect. Friends had come to support (and bring talc!) and I was feeling my most positive of the run. I think I'd started to believe I could do this, and was feeling a bit less daunted. But now, we had the night leg, a time where I think the wheels can fall off for so many runners on events like this. When I ran my Bob Graham Round I had to dedicate some of the success to my support runner Matt Stapley. Well, here he was again, my secret weapon, being deployed when I most needed someone of his skill and ability. And so, myself, Matt and James set off up and out of Ambleside to Troutbeck and then up and over into Kentmere.



Windermere - just over half way.

By now it was dark and it was time to get the head down for what was for me the crux of the route - Skeggles Water to Brothers Water. Skeggles Water feels like a long way out, but I kept telling myself it's all mileage! I had always been torn as to whether to do Kentmere Reservoir as it isn't in the 26 required. My hand was sort of forced when I asked Open Tracking (who provided the tracker) if they can remove the checkpoint from the map if I opt not to.



They said no, and so I thought it'd be best to go! The running to the Reservoir is easy, and Matt and James kept me fed and hydrated as we went - a job all my support were so very good at throughout despite my lack of desire to eat much apart from ready salted crisps. We got up and over Nan Bield, dipped Small Water and dropped to Haweswater. I had 15 minutes in a sleeping bag here to help straighten my head out, and despite not sleeping it really worked. James tagged out here, and myself and Matt ventured on and up into the night. I had two big climbs remaining, the one up and over High Street, and then the one over Sticks Pass...this was actually starting to look like this could happen.

The hours to Brothers Water passed through, with us tagging Blea Water and Hayeswater as we passed. We didn't dwell long at this checkpoint, and soon enough we were back on the road heading for Glenridding. We were just a few minutes up the road where my optimism of getting this done was hit with a sledgehammer - something had gone in my leg! I suspected my ITB, but that was a guess. It made running painful, and walking really painful. My shuffle became a hobble, but I was still moving forward. We dipped Ullswater and climbed up towards Sticks Pass. My leg felt OK when ascending, but the flat was agony - of which there was about a marathon left to go. I had a quick google as to how you would tape an ITB injury and pictures came up of these straps that go under the knee. All I had was my buff, so I put it on my leg and pulled it up. 'No way!' I said to Matt, 'It's worked!!'. The difference was amazing and I actually get back into my shuffle run rather than the laboured tin man walk I'd had to adopt.



The top of Sticks Pass, with most of the climbing behind me and probably just over 24 hours on the go.

The top of Sticks Pass was a great moment. I'd done all the hard climbs, I just had to get the miles done, but I could probably walk that. I hobbled on down to Thirlmere where the legendary Matt could tap out (and take a bow for getting me through). Scott & Charlotte were back in the support seat, and this time with Bacon sandwiches too! My nutrition to this point had been pretty poor, I just hadn't fancied much of the food I'd brought along, and so the bacon sandwich was the perfect remedy.



Sara: What do you want to eat?/ Me: Nothing, I'm not hungry/ Charlotte: I've got you that Bacon Sandwich here/ Me: Yep!

It was onto Thirlmere, and then easy road / pavement miles to Derwent Water. As I dropped to Derwent Water I saw my family for the first time which was really uplifting, plus there was a crew of friends there to clap me in. Becca of North Lakes Sports Therapy was also on hand to help make some sense of my leg issue, and whatever she did to that injury certainly helped! I was now feeling quite jubilant, although to be honest I also still wasn't allowing myself the opportunity to believe it



With the family at Derwent Water - 2 to go.



was going to happen. Naomi took over the support car role, and Sara who had done the night shift was now running with us all which was lovely.

Through the fields we went towards Dodd Wood, and then it was a bit of car dodging on the A591 before we could get off at Mirehouse. We dipped Bassenthwaite by the church - one to go! I hadn't really paid much attention to this section and was going to rely on the gpx. Fellow Cumberland Fell Runners member Les had come out to say hi and on his bike he led us through Bassenthwaite and then towards Overwater. The miles felt long, and it was only when I saw my friends and family at the end of the road near the entrance to the water that I finally smiled. I'd done it! Unbelievably!

It's funny how at the end of these things you lose concept of the time taken. It all just becomes about miles or kilometres and keeping one foot moving in front of the other. This was the hardest thing I've ever set myself up for, and it was odd that I just wasn't allowing myself to believe I was actually going to complete until right at the end. Maybe it was another bout of imposter syndrome like I had after my BG, maybe I couldn't quite believe that I could complete 105 miles on a route only 22 other people had pitted themselves against before.



The end of my 105 mile journey.

Well, with the epic support of my friends and family, I've managed to become the 23rd person to complete the Lakes, Meres and Waters in a time of just over 32 hours. Huge thanks to everyone who helped make this happen. It'll take a while to sink in I'm sure, but one thing's for sure is I'm very proud. Last year I was hardly running, and this year I've achieved not one, but two massive feats of endurance.

If there is anyone out there looking to do something a little different, on a beautiful route then I can highly recommend the LMW - just don't forget to touch Wastwater...

You can read my motivations for doing the LMW here.

I can highly recommend the 'Lakes, Meres and Waters' book by Joss Naylor and Vivienne Crow, as well as the Achillie Ratti website as a great source of info for building you very own LMW adventure.