No Cure, Always Hope Ultra – 60.6km, 4600m ascent, 16h39m

Despite having this planned for a week or two, final preparations were a little rushed. After a week away over Christmas I returned tea-time Saturday evening; on Sunday I ran the Nine Standards fell race, taking only an hour-and-half but it felt longer, and if I'd known I was going do this the following day I wouldn't have pounded down the road quite so fast. It was after the race that I was told that Monday was forecast to be a sunny day whereas the remainder of the week would be wet and windy. I ummed and ahhed whether to rush and get ready Sunday evening and try and get an early night and, also, I hadn't really prepared myself mentally. I decided to go for it.

I departed the Swinside Inn at 7:30am and could just about to see enough without use of a headtorch. As forecast, it was a beautifully sunny day, and, not to waste time, I had to resist the urge to take many photographs. The route links a series of ridges and the first leg from Swinside to Buttermere via Causey Pike and Crag Hill was easy going. The hills became busier after Buttermere and peaked on Haystacks. Along the Allen Crags to Glaramara the path was often icy, but the alternative to either side was often not quite frozen marsh. I alternated between the slow path and wet feet. In order to prevent sickness later on, I took a freeze-dried meal. I added water near Styhead Tarn and carried it until a little before Glaramara to give it time to rehydrate (which is considerably longer when using cold water). I found a spot sheltered from the wind which, as usual, turned out not to be as sheltered as I initially thought. I donned my fleece, windproof and balaclava but, foolishly, not my duvet jacket or gloves. After the fifteen minutes it took to eat the meal, I was frozen and I couldn't feel my hands – you'd think by now I would have learnt how to do things correctly. I set off in a mild panic but after 10 minutes or so the feeling in my hands painfully returned. Darkness descended by Thornythwaite Crag and I slowed up, avoiding ice a little trickier – I really should take account of this in my schedules.

The haul up Maiden Moor was exhausting. The bracken was dead but the slope was relentless – an almost constant 27 degrees over the 400m of ascent. Maiden Moor is rather uninspiring but going this way certainly made it feel like a proper mountain. Extra clothes went back on for the final high-level section to Newlands Hause. Buttermere Moss wasn't frozen but freezing and it was the only time my feet felt cold. It's almost 5 miles along the road back to Swinside. I'm sure many think Knott Rigg and Ard Crags would be a better finish but by then the appeal of an easy road is too great. I ran about half of it, although my running speed was only marginally greater than that of walking. I counted in lots of a hundred steps to keep me running and to take my mind off how tedious it was. In the dark, the lights of distant farm houses seemed to take an age to get any closer and when I first caught site of the lights of the Swinside Inn across the valley, it looked like the ascent to an Alpine hut – the brain is terrible at judging scale in the darkness. I enjoyed my day and didn't have a low spell like I did when doing the Gerry Charnley Round, but I think I may have had enough of long runs in winter for the time being.







