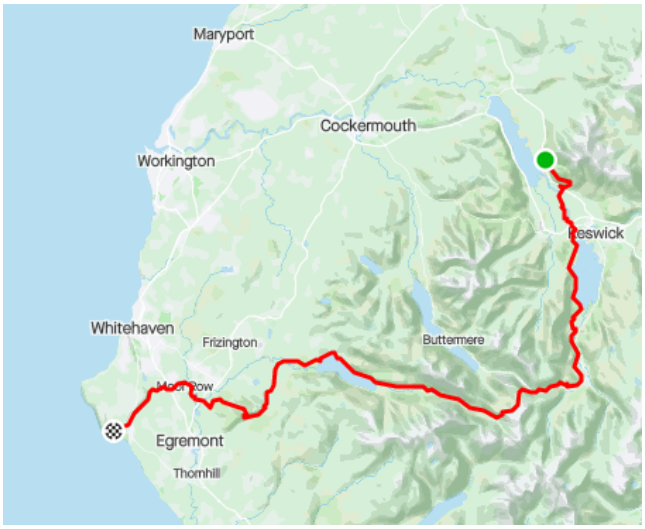
St. Bega's Way Ultra
Charlotte Harle
17th April 2021

Only those who will risk going too far, can possibly find out how far one can go.

T.S Elliott



For me this quote sums up my entire journey of preparation, running the St Bega's Ultra and the post ultra section of a good day out. Covid19 brought lots of new challenges to many of us, some big and some small but all challenges. My challenge was a large one, namely redundancy. Those that know me well in CFR, know that I am a daydreamer with clear goals for life (I am not sharing them in case some of you steal my running goals!). So when faced with redundancy I turned to a routine of daily training in my home-made gym and running on the trails of Broughton with Bertie when it was my turn for daily exercise outside. This routine needed focus or for a better word a goal and that goal very quickly became the big question "can I run an ultra". Surely, it couldn't be that hard or could it?

The St Bega's Ultra was organised yearly as a race from Dodd Wood to St Bees school by Jon Raymond. The route follows the route of the legendary Irish princess St Bega between the two chapels that bear her name. St Bega has some interesting folklore and history attached to her name including miracles for people from Millom, Workington and St Bees. Admittedly, I had no idea of any of this until after the race when Nick's mum told me about the history of the route. I discovered the route from Strava when Blackie (Mark Blackwell) decided to complete the route as a solo attempt. I borrowed the GPX file from Blackie and set my sights on becoming an ultra-running princess rather than a miracle working Irish princess (I am from East Yorkshire after all).



I followed the training program in a handy book that I discovered on the living room bookshelf (thanks Nick for the 2018 Christmas present). Lots of structured training with slow days, fast days, hill rep days, strength training days and the occasional rest day. After the first few months this felt the norm and a run post work or before work was the routine. During the post ultra weeks it has felt a little empty without this structured routine. Back to the preparation, I quickly discovered that running from my



front door to Fellbarrow and back was 21 miles (thank you to those that sparked this idea during lockdown).

The date become set as 17th April 2021 for the big day. The research into the shoes, socks, food, hydration and more importantly who I could whinge at increased as the date quickly appeared. I had started training in May 2020 so 11 months later was plenty of time to build the muscles for the SBU and the extra little section to the sea (37.8 miles according to my Suunto).

Leg 1 starts with a hill (Dodd), my glamourous very chatty assistants (Pip and Isabel) ensured that my plan to stay energy efficient was executed well by walking the first mile up Dodd. The route then takes you down through the gill path, across the A591 and along the fields in to Portinscale. This leg included being chased in circles by 2 young lambs. The key for this leg was to fuel, hydrate and maintain a speed of 10-13 minutes per mile.



Leg 2 continued from Nichol End to beyond Grange. My early glamourous assistants continued on this leg and became much more military with the fuelling. This regular fuelling assisted me later as my blood sugars remained around 9mmol to 11mmol (yours will be between 4-7 mmol). The leg was faster with the knowledge that the lake was starting to pass and the climb was starting. I had split the route in to tick off points of get to Portinscale, get beyond Derwent, get up Honister, get to Gilerthwaite then the rest was unknown territory distance wise. I collected Leg 3's eager supporters beyond Grange (Harry and Les) and was informed (I was already aware of this from the WhatsApp messages) that they had been incredibly eager and turned up several hours earlier than required. This is definitely the CFR spirit and support that makes fell running such an amazing community to be a part of. I eagerly chatted about the ford crossing at Rosthwaite which signals the amusing start of Dale Head race, in doing so I missed the turning and my watch shouted in response to being "off route".

Leg 3 was much more focused as Les was head down and my serious/seasoned navigator for the day. Harry was keeping me chatting and querying "do you need more food?" They quickly learnt that every mile that passed resulted in a beep of the watch and a cheer of the total. I was nervous about the climb up to Honister Slate Mine as I did not have time to reccy this section. The path from Seatoller quickly gave way to the climb up to the path along the road. Surprisingly this was nowhere near as steep as my brain had imagined and my brain turned to the car fill of food sat at Honister. Watermelon was the topic of choice for the final 1.5 miles up to Honister. Thank you, Sophie, for your electrolyte refreshing idea from your Bob Graham!

Team Leg 4 were eagerly waiting with cheers from CFR's loudest cheerleader (Sandra), barks from Bertie and Brodie along with a cheerful wave from our Honister cheerful face (Scott). What I learnt from the car park was allow people to help! Talc on the feet and watermelon eaten we were back off on the route. When I say we, I mean the Leg 4/5 gang (Les, Paul, Ian and Harry). The chatter and swapping of stories aided with my plod up the mine track to Drum House. From here it is a case of letting the landscape guide you down to Black Sail Hut. There are several paths down from Honister and ours was quite broken up but the laughter definitely helped with the picking up of my pace. I had read numerous times that the

body will keep going, but it is the mental battle that makes or breaks an ultra. Surround yourself with CFR and the miles will fly by! We dropped to Black Sail Hut and joined the extremely familiar valley path. Memories of Bronze and Silver Duke of Edinburgh expeditions reappeared and the stories continued to fuel our journey along the harder valley tracks.

Leg 5 continued with Paul, Ian and Brodie. The path follows the Ennerdale valley path and quickly starts to find dog walkers, cyclists and families. I continued to shout the miles but the tiredness started as we ticked through the early 20s. The sun was shining but the endless feeling of the Ennerdale trails started to hit. Bronze DofE whingeing of how far it was from Black Sail Hut to Ennerdale Scout Camp played on my mind however I had told myself that if I got to Ennerdale and wanted to say "I want to go home" then that would be fine. We quickly reached the Scout Camp perimeter and the miles were edging closer to a marathon! As my watch showed 26.2 miles, I started to feel a tear forming of happiness however my team support where on a completely different page and chatting away about cricket or Ford Escorts so my tear did not form as nobody really cared.

We reached Ennerdale Bridge to a party like atmosphere of chatter and CFR members out in force. Sam and Mario both drove past to a response of a tired wave. Here I repacked with a view to sustain the long-lasting carbs but also to focus on salt as the sun was still shining and cramp as not too far away. An Aldi rice pudding, some more watermelon and an amazing latte from the Gather (thank you Sian!) we set off. Leg 6 was made up of Sian, Sandra, Paul, Nick and Bertie who let me keep my head down and allowed me to plod along the roadside. The route then reaches the back of Nannycatch and takes you up the path beyond Chimneys or the local name of up Bummers. This climb was tougher than Honister and my blood sugars started to drop. This is when the first gel of the day had to be sourced for a very quick sugar boost. The path on to Dent gave way to running again and the watch beeped to signal 31 miles (50km). This had been my goal and I could see the sea and St Bees head in the not too far away distance.

We continued down the Coast to Coast path or to us fell runners the familiar route of Jarrett's Jaunt to meet Anna, Paul and Ian. Where we started the "urbanised leg" aka the journey through Cleator and Moor Row. The route follows the Coast to Coast route along the cycle path to Moor Row then to the bridge where you drop down to the fields near the Science Park. I am not sure what St Bega would make of this section of urbanisation in comparison to her journey! This is where the tiredness set in, I felt good and my legs were continuing but my mind knew that the end was getting closer. I had recently read an article by Damian Hall who helpfully suggests eating when the mood drops. A handful of squashies later, I was back and ready to go. It is surprising what 10g of carbohydrate/a handful of pink sweets can do! We were met in the fields by the earlier eager supporters/cheerleaders (Pip and Isabel). Their excitement was contagious which caused me to do my usual determined approach of head down and push against what you face. We waved to the train and the Leg 7 DJ started her song choice (thanks Pip and Sian for your singing and music videos). We appeared through the woods and gates to the edge of St Bees school to what is traditionally the "finish" however 1.7 miles extra never hurt anybody if it means a dip in the Irish Sea. We collected Rob as we ran through St Bees to several carefully selected songs "Gotta get thru this"



and “Here comes the Hotstepper”. The sea appeared and my tired legs remained strong as the cold water cheered that I had done it. I had run an ultra! I had completed the SBU plus a little bit.

St Bees beach had lots of happy familiar faces of friends, support crew and race organiser, Jon (thanks Howard)!

Now on to the next goal/daydreaming of long runs…

