Eastern Fells (2 Jul 2019)

Well that took a long time! I started off slowly and got slower. The beginning was exciting; I'd gone 200m along the road and was looking down, suddenly there was a whoosh that ruffled my hair accompanied by a screech – I quickly turned to see a buzzard rising into the air. I could hear chicks squawking in the nest nearby. The adult was now perched on a branch and as soon as I began running down it came again! I managed to get a few pictures and a little video of it swooping but it wasn't quite as brave if I was looking at it.

For this run, I decided that rather than setting off at ridiculous o'clock in the morning, I would have a normal night's sleep and set off at 9am. This meant I'd end up the dark, but looked forward to the coolness, after suffering in the heat on my previous attempt of this book. I pondered the success of this plan as I sat shivering in the wind shelter on the summit of Helvellyn, wearing all the clothes I had. I couldn't rest any longer, I had to get going; I stepped out into the strong wind and it wasn't long before my chin became numb. I was colder than on my winter round, in freezing temperatures, of the Central Fells.

Helvellyn – so good I climbed it twice! There are a number of options for the route taking in Helvellyn, Catstye Cam and Birkhouse Moor. I looked forward to the prospect of ascending Striding Edge as a more interesting way to regain the high tops, even though on paper it's not the quickest route. So I passed over the summit of Helvellyn, descended Swirral Edge to Catstye Cam, down and out to Birkhouse Moor before ascending Striding Edge (all by head torch). I only followed the apex of Striding Edge a short distance, mostly talking the easy path. I was concerned that my balance was a little bit compromised after 17 hours out on the hill and it was a little harder judging stepping down onto small ledges by head torch. I wondered what the MRT report would say! I knew I'd cracked the route when I regained the high tops; the ascents along the Dodd's ridge are small and at a gentle angle, but it was still 13.5km to Clough Head and a further 6km to my car.

I took similar food to that of my round of the Western Fells and the result was the same – I couldn't eat or drink and eventually began retching. Why did I think the result would be any different? I started with 1.35kg of food and returned with 0.85kg of dead weight. For that I could take a stove and some freeze-dried food and eat a 'proper' meal and have a brew.

I'm not sure I'll be able to do the two remaining books (Far Eastern and Southern) in the same manner, i.e. solo and unsupported. I spent a lot of time on this trip considering where I might bail out. I tell myself to concentrate only on the next climb, but as a consequence of knowing the route so well, I was constantly thinking, "I've got this climb to do, followed by that climb, then that one; I'll never manage it." I could also train better for such events, but I'm more interested in doing the books than training for them!

(95km, 5308m of ascent. Time taken – 22:26; stationary 1:17; 3:43 in the dark.)







