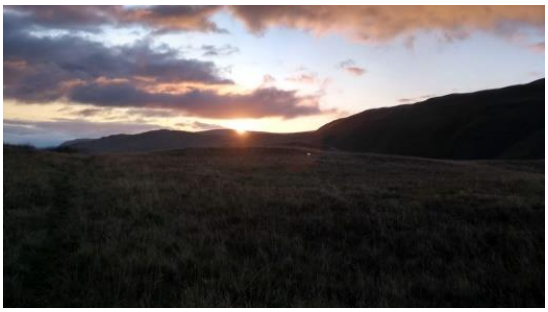
Far Eastern Fells – First Attempt (8 Aug 2019)

Failed! After a few hours I dropped my map. I navigate using maps on my phone and I carry a paper map as a backup. I considered retracing my steps, it may not have been far, but I didn't, I'd never needed a paper map during the previous 5 books. The day was rather sunnier than expected and I found running a struggle in the afternoon. I was glad when the weather turned and cloud rolled in down to around 700m. The wind increased and I was cold for the first time. I wanted it to be cooler but was worried it might go too far! Darkness came and the torchlight scattered rather than penetrated. I'd noticed earlier that my phone battery seemed to behaving differently – it had drained a little quicker than expected and my power bank didn't get it's charge as high as expected. I began to wonder if it was going to last, so began to switch the phone off when I could. After 17 hours, near the summit of High Street, disaster struck – I turned it off at 30% and when I turned it back on it was 3%! At such a low percentage it's not usually long before the phone dies completely. It was dark, the cloud was down, the wind speed increasing, and the forecast was for rain later. I did consider following the High Street ridge by compass alone but decided that it was too risky being up there in such conditions without a map. So before the phone died completely, I worked out a route to the car – northwards and I'd be funnelled into Ramps Gill and, after by 2km of boggy hell, I'd reach a track. The valley was a boggy morass, as I thought it would be, and it's interesting how aches and pains are worse when the reason for motion has been removed. During the descent I switched my phone off and on several times and it never did die completely, so perhaps I could have completed the route after all!

Of course, I now just wanted to get home as quickly as possible, but I was so tired it felt like my eyeballs were rolling in their sockets and I couldn't focus properly on the road ahead. So I pulled over and immediately fell asleep. I awoke after half an hour and set off again only to realise that I still couldn't drive properly. I pulled over again and slept for another 15 minutes before completing a rather frightening journey home.







Far Eastern Fells – Second Attempt (15 Aug 2019)

Success and the usual refrain – "That took longer than expected!" The only way to stop me dwelling on my aborted attempt a week ago was to finish the job. Thursday's forecast looked the best, although it had worsened during the week. There would now be rain for the first few hours but it would then brighten. Another set of fronts would bring rain starting at around 3am Friday morning. Hopefully, I would be finished by then. So as I pranced around the car park opposite the church above Howtown, ostensibly to warm up, I chuckled at the twists of fate that had led me to standing in the same spot I'd been in a week ago and succeeded for a minute or two in avoiding taking the first step, delaying the effort that would be required once I had. It was dry initially but soon a shower started. The wind was gusting strongly, maybe 20-30 mph; I hadn't taken note of that in the forecast. I kept telling myself I just had to endure the rain a few hours then it would be it would be a pleasant day. The rain did stop and the weather brightened, but the wind remained making it chilly at times. With the amount of rain we had over the past month it was not surprising that the ground was sodden, with much standing water; my feet were wet all day.

I'd started a new food regime on my first attempt last week. I'd discovered that whilst after 7-8 hours I struggled to eat or drink on the move, if I stopped then I could do both. Hopefully, it would also reduce the sick feeling and retching that's plagued the latter stages of my very long runs. So I'd bought a very light gas burner and experimented with freeze dried food. My first stop was after just over 7 hours and was very pleasant in the sunshine and out of the wind. My second was 6 hours later. I had to put on my warm clothes because, despite sheltering behind a wall, the wind was getting through and making me cold. When I set off uphill I overheated and began to feel sick. Oh no! On my previous attempt I had felt good after my second stop. Fortunately, the sick feeling was mild compared to what I suffered on previous runs and whether stopping to eat is a solution or not, having cooking equipment certainly gives me something to look forward to.

Around this time I charged my phone (which I use to navigate) using a power bank and everything worked as it should, returning the phone to full charge. It dawned on me that on my first attempt it may have been my power bank that was faulty in failing to get my phone back up to full charge. I could have finished the route last week if only I'd taken my larger power bank. For the sake of an additional 56g, it would have saved the time spent in preparation and the time and mental and physical effort of doing over three-quarters of the route again. I almost cried at the realisation.

I started using my head torch Branstree. The rain, which had been forecast to begin after 3am, began just after midnight and, together with low cloud at times, slowed me to a snail's pace. I'd planned the route to finish along the route of High Street because, in my mind's eye, the ridge would be a nice run – gently descending on easy paths. The reality was very different . Whilst the route does descend overall, it's over such a long distance that most of the time it's more like it's level and the paths were waterlogged and rutted. In the darkness, it was difficult to distinguish between water and peat, hard ground and soft. At one point, I was almost pitched into a peat grough, just managing to stop myself. It was remarkably easy to lose the path in the dark, especially when avoiding boggy ground to the left or right. I doubt I could have navigated successfully using map and compass.

It was still dark when I began the ascent of Steel knots and I failed to locate the path through the bracken. Pushing through on sheep 'paths', I eventually popped out on the proper path. Surprisingly, the rain had stopped and shortly after leaving the summit it had brightened enough to stop using my head torch. Hallin Fell was a nice hill upon which to finish – not too much ascent, not too steep and slipper-friendly grass for an easy descent. I finished in twenty-four and a half – maybe I'll have to change my title to 'Wainwright Book in a Day (and a bit)'!

(96km, 5378m of ascent. Time taken – 24:31; stationary 1:39; 7:34 in the dark.)







