

## The Lakeland 100- The Novice Trail Runner's Report

If anyone was to ask me the hardest race I had ever competed in, then my immediate answer would be "The Lakeland 100" (I'm not trying to put you off). On a more positive note, if anyone was to ask my favourite race, the Lakeland 100 would certainly be in the top 3.

There were 3 reasons that I entered the race- I wanted to raise money for the Motor Neurone Disease Association, I was looking for a new challenge and thirdly what a great excuse to spend even more time in the Lake District.

The furthest I had ever run on the road was a marathon and 21 miles off-road- probably not the ideal profile for an ultra-distance runner. To add further complication my main race of the year, Roth Triathlon, was 5 weeks before the Lakeland 100.

The plan was to complete Roth as fast as possible and then try and recover (quickly) and hope that I had enough base fitness to be able to run for 30 hours plus. Sounds simple!

The weekend before the race I checked out the 1<sup>st</sup> leg- from Coniston to Seathwaite. This was a bit of a wake up call- it was very warm, it was hilly (what do you expect in a race with 20,000 feet of climb?) and it started to dawn on me that 100 miles is a long, long way. It didn't help that I spent the evening in the company of fell runners, including the race organiser, Marc Laithwaite. When asked, I thought I would finish in around 26-27 hours. Seeing Marc's raised eyebrows made me re-consider this. There was further food for thought when Marc mentioned he expected about half of the entrants not to finish the course.

After a nervous week, race day came. I arrived in Coniston early on the Friday afternoon, in the sunshine, and put my tent up and checked (again) that I had all my kit. For the rest of the afternoon more nervous-looking people arrived. I tried to eat as much as possible and before I knew it, it was start time. As a group we walked to the start. At 7.30pm we were off. This had to be the slowest start to any race I have competed in. On "Go", everyone looked at each other and then started to walk. At this point I thought I should be running, in spite of the slight incline. How do you pace yourself for a 100 mile run? There's not much help out there.

After a few miles I grouped up with 4 other runners which helped with pacing. We lost one of the group on the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage and then the 4 of us stuck together up to about 65 miles when I got dropped (my legs didn't seem to work going down hill).

That 1<sup>st</sup> night running in the dark was fantastic. It was reasonably mild, and although there was no moon it was a cloudless night and the stars were truly amazing.

I am not going to bore you with the full details of the run. If you have entered then you will experience it all for yourself. A high point was arriving at Dockray (52 mile point) feeling quite good and with no blisters. A mistake was changing into road shoes at this point- the conditions got very wet and trail shoes would have been better. A low point was arriving at Howtown (65 miles), with the weather turning and not having my fully water-proof running jacket- I could have cried at this point.

A low point was being dropped a couple of miles later. An immediate high point was being on my own and running at my own pace along the banks of Haweswater. The most surreal moment was running through Ambleside at 8pm on a Saturday evening. Another highlight was the massive thunderstorm that struck on leaving Ambleside- it was like having a Power shower. This set the tone for the weather for the rest of the run.

Some learning points- Camelbacks are great, Snicker bars are too dry to eat whilst running. Even rice pudding can taste good. Trail shoes are good, road shoes not so good. A GPS is invaluable (for a novice) and not waterproofing your map/road book is a big, big mistake.

The biggest learning point was telling friends and family a predicted finishing time. This just added undue pressure and stress as I had predicted I would be in Ambleside at 5pm. It was obvious by lunchtime on the Saturday that I would be a lot later and then I became concerned that my family would be sat in Ambleside waiting (and worrying). Mobile phones (especially T-Mobile) do not have great coverage in the Lakes so it was not straight forward to get a message about my later arrival. My advice would be to let your family and friends know that you will see them at the finish, and leave it at that.

The checkpoints were a definite highlight. The people were so helpful and nothing was too much trouble. Every person who helped really deserves a mention, but the checkpoint at Lakes Runner in Ambleside was truly special. It wasn't just the ibuprofen that made my legs work again, but the enthusiasm of the staff at the shop just made it such a memorable, uplifting experience.

It was a strange feeling to be 87 miles into a run, with 15 miles remaining (it should be called the Lakeland 102). There aren't many races you do where you feel you've nearly finished with 15 miles to go.

With 10 miles remaining I was lucky to join up with 4 guys running the 50 mile route. They were great company and basically nursed me to the finish. A massive thank you has to go to them.

With a mile to go I told the 4 guys to go on ahead as I knew where I was going and I was really struggling running down the final descent. It was a very weird feeling to finish at 1.40am on the Sunday- a race time of 30 hours and 10 minutes and 8<sup>th</sup> place. It was later the next morning that I discovered that only 11 of the 32 starters completed the course. The winning time, by Steve Burkinshaw was an incredible 23 hours and 40 minutes.

When I wrote this my intention was to remind me of just how tough the race was and put me off ever doing it again. However, it has reminded me of just how enjoyable the whole experience was. Unfortunately I won't be racing the Lakeland 100 in 2009 due to other race commitments. However, I am now considering 2010.

Good luck to those racing in 2009 and should anyone want any further details of my experience of the event then I can be contacted at [rich@bardon.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:rich@bardon.fsnet.co.uk).