



Race Report - Montane Lakeland 100 – 1st/2nd August 2009

Despite only being in its second year, this epic Cumbrian challenge is already widely regarded as the 'UK's toughest ultra' and it's not difficult to see why. With 6300m of climbing, extremely rocky terrain and a 40-hour limit for the 100 mile race, the event certainly lives up to its image. Even for those tackling the separate 50 mile event, there is still 3200m of ascent, a night stage and, as the course isn't marked, navigation skills are also required.

The 100 mile race is a completely circular route taking in the most beautiful scenery that the lake district has to offer, and on some of the most rugged trails and paths. The route starts and finishes in the pretty town of Coniston and heads north on the fell around Buttermere, Wastwater and up towards Pooley Bridge, north of Ullswater where the 50 mile event starts 12 hours later. The route then heads south past Ullswater across to the popular town of Ambleside and finally to the finish in Coniston where most runners finish in the early hours of the morning. On paper it sounds simple, but the reality is that the distance involved is only a small part of the challenge. The terrain underfoot is extremely rough and rocky and at times there are knee-deep bogs, chest high bracken and slippery rugged descents. Add to that the fact that at least half the route could be undertaken in the dark, it is certainly not a challenge for the faint hearted.

The event, sponsored by technical outdoor clothing company, Montane, has already seen huge growth and has tripled in size since last year. The 2009 event attracted 320 competitors, split equally between the 100 and 50 mile routes, with some runners choosing to compete as a pair or a team of three. Last year, only 30 of the 70 entrants actually made it to the finish line of the 100 mile race and there were no female finishers. Two facts which are testament to the toughness of the challenge and puts it in the same league with the epic 'Ultra Trail de Mont Blanc' which boasts only a 40% finish rate.

Friday 31st July at 7.30pm saw 111 brave runners head off into the pouring rain and fast approaching dark, to tackle the monumental 100 mile challenge ahead. By 10am the next morning, after a night of being battered by rain and wind, many had already dropped out, finding the going just too tough. But at the sharp end the race was on, with last years winner and local fell runner, Steve Birkinshaw, battling for the lead with relative newcomer, Andy Rankin. Passing through the 50 mile checkpoint in 11 hours 34

minutes, they were incredibly only 6 seconds apart. It was only at Ambleside after 75 miles where Birkinshaw was forced to rest and lost valuable time and the lead. Rankin went on to storm to the finish in an incredible 22 hours 46 minutes with Birkinshaw taking second in 24:05.32. Jez Bragg and Digby Harris took joint third in 26:58.23, crossing the line together. The only solo woman ever to start and finish the 100 mile event was Rachel Lawrence in an incredible 31:47.03 and Jillian Ross (running as a pair with husband Christopher) was the only other woman to finish in 38:41.13. *"It was a superb event"* said Rankin. *"The atmosphere was understated, but really friendly, and the support that the marshals and other competitors gave was fantastic. Steve and I were running together for most of the race, and I really valued being able to share the navigation - particularly as the weather didn't make it easy overnight, and Steve had more local knowledge than I did! The Trail du Mont Blanc is the only other race of this length I've done"* he continued *'and in many ways I did find this tougher. Although there is quite a bit more ascent and descent on UTMB, trails on the continent are always carefully marked so that there is no need for navigation skills. The weather on the Lakeland 100 was considerably more challenging, and much of the terrain is incredibly tough, too - if you're not confident at running downhill on slippery, loose wet rocks in the pitch dark, the Lakeland 100 isn't for you! It's a fantastic challenge though - I'm sure I'll be back again."*

There were 45 eventual finishers (only 40% of those who started) including Italian Giovanni Torelli who, despite missing the cut off, finished in a brave 42:40.31 after struggling with translation and language problems.

Noon on Saturday 1st August saw a dry and bright start to the 50 mile event which picked up the route half way through at the Dalemmain Estate, north of Pooley Bridge. 147 runners set off for a deceptively easy loop of the estate before heading off onto the fell and the tough hills and terrain. Race director Marc Laithwaite was keen to stress however, that the 50 mile event isn't just the *'easy option'* or a *'bolt on'* to the 100. *'The 50 miler is a tough race and an event in itself'* he said *'the danger is to think it's a fun run compared to the 100. In a nutshell, it's not'*. Starting at lunchtime meant that most runners would be required to run through at least part of the night, but that didn't apply to the overall winner Mark Palmer, who finished in an incredible 8:29.07 and was back before darkness even fell. Hot on his heels however were Martin Beale in 8:46.32 and third place Andrew James in 9:19.39 with first lady Lucy Colquhoun crossing the line in a superb 9:51.19. There were 135 finishers and only 12 non-finishers, indicating, that

despite being tough, the 50 represents an achievable challenge given the right preparation.

Most competitors agreed the Montane Lakeland 100 was a tough event, with many of the experienced ultra runners comparing it to the Ultra Trail de Mont Blanc (which completion of the race incidently qualifies you for), some claiming it to be even more challenging. Commenting on the race, Laithwaite said *'we have been overwhelmed with the demand for the race this year and thrilled with the growing success. We are indebted to our main sponsor, Montane and extremely grateful to head torch manufacturer, Petzl who provided prizes for the winners and Lakes Runner in Ambleside. We've had some fantastic feedback from participants and already have plans to make it even better for 2010.'* With such enthusiasm from everyone involved in the event and the impeccable organisation, this is a race which is destined for great things.

The next Montane Lakeland 100 will be held in August 2010.

For results and more details see www.lakeland100.co.uk

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