

3 Rings of Shap 14 June 2014

62 miles, 2300m of climb



Each ring started and ended at Shap Memorial Hall

After some consultation I decided to start at 8:30am rather than the early mass start at 8am, mainly in case I was quick enough to reach check point 1 before it opened at 10:30am. It actually took me 2.5h to reach it in the end so there wasn't really a need. However, what the late start meant compared to most others in the event was that I was passing people for most of Ring 1, albeit mainly walkers. It did include nearly all of the best known Runfurther gang though, Tony Wimbush (O/60 chap – although he did start at 8:30 too!), then Nick Ham – who seemed to be struggling a bit near the top of Mosedale, Andy Robinson after first check point, intent on cooling his feet in the stream then surprisingly Emma David (with Mark) who I had expected to be starting later than me and finally Dick Scroop. Great to see the gang out.

Ring 1 meant a steady climb to the top of Mosedale and then a descent down into Swindale. It was good to get out onto the hill side and the warm weather meant that only lightweight gear was needed. Not sure what some of the walkers backpacks had in them – some were catering for a number of eventualities. For the last part of Ring 1 there were few people around so I was navigating full time – something that I continued doing for the next 48 miles. However my tactic, although laborious had been to print out snippets of OS maps and mark up the route annotated with notes from the LDWA text description which worked really well. So I trotted past Peggy Nut Croft (mistakenly Penny Nut Croft on the OS map) and into the memorial hall to complete Ring 1 and generally feeling OK.

I had taken a pile of stuff into the hall and now had to work out what changes to make to my gear. In the end it was minimal – a second set of maps, some food stocks and a tablet in the drinks bottle. The lady behind the food counter was most disappointed when I said that all I needed was water. Emma arrived just before I left, she had arranged for one or two other chaps to jog round with her on Ring 2 and someone else on Ring 3.

Out for Ring 2. Railway and motorway crossed and then an anticlockwise circuit (all Rings were anticlockwise) taking in the main rivers, including the river Lowther. At 35km on leaving the Wyegill Plantation there is a gate to go through followed by a gentle grassy slope which I jogged down to reach a second gate. However, I failed to see the grid under the grass before the gate and fell awkwardly damaging knee and arm. "Anything broken?" I pondered. No, phew, just cuts. I put a large rock on the grid to discourage anyone else from doing the same.

Past Reagill Grange I was thankful to the taped section through the woods – it was yuck. Hard Bank felled plantation was another tricky bit of nav – mainly underfoot, then it got more straightforward. Drinks taken by the stepping stones and Ford then continue along the river where I met the final of the Runfurther gang – Karen Rush. As is often the case with Karen she was quick to usher me through – not sure whether this is so she can keep at her own pace, or because she doesn't want someone to slow down for her. She does have a great finish though so it would not surprise me to see her come past in say 5 hours' time when I flag. We did a few km together and then gradually parted.

There were many opportunities on the route for short cuts and Andy R had said on the Runfurther page that we needed to be honest and stick to the route. I managed to do this in most places, occasionally my nav was out. Morland village was a good example of taking the Easterly road option or the official route through the village and church – which I did, and it popped me out ahead of a couple of other runners. Perhaps they were using the LDWA text description – the problem with that is that once off course there is no easy way to rectify apart from retrace.

The fields before Great Stickland were tiring out a few. The CP gave opportunity for a few to gather – and recover, but I passed through fairly quickly with a water top up and half a rock cake. Under the motorway this time and eventually to Howgate for drinks. I wasted a few minutes looking around Highgate for the concrete platform, gave up and then found it 100m further up the road. A dog came up to me and started licking my cut leg – not good.

Hee hee, the suspension bridge was fun – just with one on it. I dare say with more than one you could really bounce and swing around. An alternative route out of Rosgill to Ring1 meant a more direct route into Shap. A few fields of long grass – thanks goodness for no rain and it was energy sapping enough without it. A few cows were getting frisky but it came to nothing. So into Shap and I trotted past Peggy Nut Croft and into the memorial hall to complete Ring 2 and generally feeling a bit jaded.

Much the same as the previous transition, water with tablet, extra food (I carried far too much) and torch. Again the lady behind the food counter was most disappointed when I said that all I needed was water and a chap encouraged me to take a banana – so I did, half of which I managed to eat.

Off we go on Ring 3. Railway, motorway crossed and through Oddendale quarries and out on to the moors and the limestone plateaus. I really liked Ring 3. Much of it was runnable, even some of the gentle uphill – until I needed an excuse to walk. The areas warned about for 'tricky nav' turned out fine in the light, with discernable paths appearing in the right places. No doubt helped by the fact that some people may have chosen to only do ring 1 and 3 or just ring 3 and so had already been round long before I got there, plus some faster runners were ahead

The Great Asby Scar nature reserve was a continual gentle grassy downhill – a real joy to trot along and after bit of lane jogging and walking CP3 was reached. I took advantage of a chair for a few minutes whilst waster was topped up, had a piece of cake and left. "That was a quick stop", one of the two marshals said, I thought I'd dallied a bit. I passed a few walkers who were either doing one other ring and ring 3 or perhaps just a very leisurely ring 3. A while back I'd seen a couple of Oyster Catchers – bit out of place, now I thought I'd spotted a puffin making a strange noise – obviously it wasn't. So on to Gaythorne Hall where the route had changed from going around to going through. This was clearly labelled with LDWA signs, so no problem. Eventually reaching Raise Howe, a high point in this area and so quiet. No traffic, light breeze if any, warm. And now a lovely grassy slope to jog down before the road in to Crosby.

A few km up road then path to Oddendale. I was definitely flagging now with only the occasional jog making an appearance. My mind was playing a few tricks too as I thought a seagull which was making a sound like a dolphin. But I know the last part of this route was the same as the first part which meant it should be a good jogging finish. I'd forgotten about the slight deviation along the road under Hardendale Nab, but once this was covered down I went, motorway, railway and trot along to the Memorial Hall for the final time. I passed maybe up to 6 people on this section who were all just starting out on Ring 3, well they still had 12 hours left to get round in the 26 hour time limit but I did not envy them.

The time keeper chap welcomed me in and punched by card. He then mistakenly asked if I was continuing, to which I replied that I was thinking of stopping. He then realised I'd completed all 3 rings and got excited and apologised. Often on completion I just flake out but this time I made a bit of an effort to do a few stretches, then flaked out. A few bits of food from the food counter, "You only want pasta, but we've got meat and potato pie".

After recovering for a while in came Emma, and then Karen only one minute behind. I think Emma ended up first lady – well done. A went for a sleep in the car before driving home, and felt for those still out on ring 3 and by now the drizzle and rain was falling. This would make it both uncomfortable clothes wise and also underfoot through the grassy fields.

A well organised and friendly event with great food.

Nigel Aston