

(International) Grand Tour of Skiddaw  
23 August 2014



*The start/finish area and camping field outside the sports hall*

I said hello to Charlie Sharp on the start line and expected that he might come in second behind the inform Ian Symmington. However I found out some 9+ hours later that Charlie had taken the victory – well done, in a record time of just over 7 hours, knocking 30 mins off last years' time. This was only the second running of the event and participants rose sharply to over 100 solo and pairs.

I travelled up Friday afternoon, not enjoying M1 A1M stationary traffic and road closure on A66 so was pleased to reach the venue in the grounds of Lime House School and just relax. I'd left my cooked pasta in the fridge at home (oops) so was pleased to partake of some nosh from the hot food stall (Mobile Wood Fired Pizza) which was there for the weekend and a tea (not coffee as I don't like it). Registration and full comprehensive kit check done, and goodies and a water proof smallish map and route instructions received. The camping area was so quiet with competitors turning in for an early night. Even Saturday morning was a gentle get up with no one rushing around. I chatted to a couple of French chaps who had travelled from Northern France to do the race because someone had recommended it. Race briefing was given by the race director Gaynor Prior of Pure Outdoors Events, with microphone – good, everyone could hear. Simple instructions. 15 mins later we were off at 8am, some with extra layers, gloves and hats on whilst there was still a nip in the air, later sun cream could have been applied as the weather stayed superb for the whole route, perhaps a little warm.



*Hot food and drinks served throughout the weekend*

Although I stood near the front for the start of the race I knew that was not going to be my position in the race. However it did give me a chance to see Charlie and Ian. In fact as the race unfolded through field, gate, field, gate, field, gate etc. up the Caldew river valley I did get to see Charlie and Ian jogging off into the distance. The pace was already too quick for me so at first sign of an uphill (2.5 miles at Bellbridge) I took a moment (walked) to eat and drink something. The field ahead was not losing me and no one immediately behind – I'll either have to navigate or try and catch up. I decided to try and catch up and gave chase (haa haa) with Mr webbed shoes ahead. It was a few miles before I eventually caught up when the path went into Parson's Park woods, with seemingly everyone ahead going too high and having to drop down to get on the right path. These woods offered the only really muddy section of the whole route.

CP1 at Caldew, good welcome, efficient and well organised – as were all the CPs. Water bottles quickly topped up, a bit of cake and I took a gel for later. That previous section was going to be a long way to run later in the race when the route returned the same way. Now running with a chap who worked in Carlisle and had been round this end of the fells for training trips so knew the route well. I was pleased to get on the fell and begin the climb up High Pike, giving time to take on board more refreshment. I started on the gel from the CP and thought it tasted funny and wondered what flavour it was – 'Espresso' – yuk, not surprising I didn't like it. I let the grass have the remaining contents of the gel and gave up a whole pocket of the race vest to hold the empty packet. I substituted the coffee taste for the sharp sweet mint of some Kendal Mint Cake and continued.

Chris Davies came past, saying that he'd been injured for 10 months and was getting back into it – he was certainly going well with (overlarge) rucksack swaying on his back to the fast rhythm of his step. He gradually went into the distance and overtook Carlisle man ahead. The safety marshal at Lingy hut kindly directed me downhill and not to follow other runners who were not in the race going a different direction. I guess this would be a place to get lost in low vis. Chris and Carlisle man were in sight as I took care going down Beck valley where I passed Carlisle man at the bridge and joined the easy to follow Cumbria Way all the way to Skiddaw House. A chap in red was ahead and slowly, slowly I was catching him. A continuous jog all the way to the House and then the super scenery as the track hugged the steep West side of Glenderaterra Beck all the way to photographers corner (Sunday Sport) and CP2 at Latrigg car park where I finally caught up with red man and thanked him for towing me along.

Soon through a most helpful CP and the big climb of the whole course. I kept up a good pace and overtook a few people, including one chap who thought going up backwards less painful. The weather was holding and the dip in temperature as we gained height did not need any extra garments to cope with it. The NE boys (Jim Thompson & Chris Kennedy) were racing as a pair and knew they were lying second. I'd seen from a long distance away that they were good on flat and downhill, however as they were going a little slower than me uphill I arrived at Skiddaw summit slightly ahead. By the time I'd given the bell a good ringing, tightened my shoe lace and got going again they were ahead.

Parachutes on. I was not ready for this descent and really impressed by the boys as they shot down. I tried in vain to keep up and could not. However, once the saddle before Carl Side was reached I caught up a little on the small uphill. Down Long Side Edge the same thing, with the boys brilliant on their descent ("We're fell runners really", they told me later) and only because I kept jogging on the uphill bits was I able to stay in sight of them. This was going to be a descent that I paid for either later in the race or next day or next day but one (DOMS) or all of them. A large clear

fluorescent race sign directed us off the ridge route and on to softer running. An ankle twist caused me some concern but the boys were still in sight and eventually because they paused to check the map I caught them.

Jogging with the boys up to CP3 at Peter House Farm we discussed whether they would enter the Bullock Smithy – something I have done a number of times; they may do. A slightly daunting welcome at the CP with half a dozen people in high vis jackets it seemed like it was a police road block. All good though. Quick through the CP whilst the boys stopped for a snifter of coke. Careful through the first field to find the right 'corner' and get on the Cumbria Way. I joined up with Olivier Guiavarch who was French, living in London and we travelled more or less together over the next section, he was following the route notes and I followed a combination of 1:25000 and 1:50000 map sections. He'd lost 10 mins getting lost on the previous section so was probably grateful of some help.

Once at Orthwaite nav became simpler with mainly road and good track although still necessary to stay awake to get the right turn off. The various motivational sayings on signs on gates seem to be increasing although my brain was not able to fully interpret them, especially once it gone onto Shakespeare quotes. I was now struggling and the easy lolloping style of Olivier was not matched by my laboured shuffle. At Nether Row it was familiar ground as the route now joined the outgoing route for the remainder of the journey. That did not make it any easier. However, downhill to CP4 (revisiting), some cake, water and I took no gel this time.

Olivier easily went ahead now as my shuffle slowed to a walk/jog with any bit of up becoming a walk. Suddenly Chris Davies came past – he'd done a deviation "Nearly to Carlisle" he said. Yet his 'effort' had not diminished and he disappeared ahead. On exiting the woods two people came past Michael Irving and Helen Price. They were travelling faster but I found a bit more speed and managed to increase my snail pace and stick with them to Churchtown, where Chris had again done a detour and overshot the left turn.

My chasing energy had gone and I was just looking forward to finishing. The grassy fields were actually a relief for me rather than the hard road surface. Through the Caldew river at the shallow point and the returning field, gate, field, gate etc. Less than a mile from the finish and Mark Fowell in tracksters overtook me. He must have been putting on a finishing spurt as he too was going well. Some of the children who were attending the religious gathering at the school used for our start/finish venue were wandering in the fields near the finish in their pristine black and white clothes – matching the Fresian cattle. They were a little scared of the cows though and jogged beside me to get past the cows.

At the last gate, with a final motivational sign and saying from Churchill I turned for the finish only to have Mark come past again after he'd done a wrong turn. A chance to stay with him – my legs did not agree and he finished 10 seconds ahead. I'd taken 15 mins longer on that section than on the way out. I was pleased with my race time though, quicker than I had expected for the whole route, just 2 hours behind the winner. I sat in a chair at the finish for a while and enjoyed the end. Shower, soup and chatting with other finishers. I would have liked a little more from the food/drink offerings at the finish – especially considering the goodies that were available at the CPs. The NE boys were in and so was Emma after a great run.

Overall this was a really well organised and relaxed event. They paid attention to the critical things (safety, CP stocks etc.) without any fussing. Well done and thank you to all the helpers and organisational team.

Nigel Aston