

The Fellsman
25-26th April 2015
61 miles, 3,300m



Ingleton: Waiting for organisers briefing and the '3, 2, 1, Go'

One week to go, 50th anniversary Fellsman map ordered and received. Getting that saved much faffing around with other detailed maps and cut outs since the map was slightly waterproof and easy enough to fold. This was my first Fellsman. I carefully went round a probable route and highlighted it and read a few race reports and noted anything of navigation value. I then did a practice kit packing into my smallest 'vest' rucksack. The problem area was the mug. I got out a bigger rucksack – no problem, and then got a smaller mug, experimented with bumbag as an addition with the smaller rucksack. In the end I went larger rucksack. I did however find my folded mug and wondered if that would pass the kit check.

Arrived in good time at Threshfield and parked in the field. Kit check was fine, and I asked whether I could use the folded mug to which the reply was, "I suppose so." Back to the car and repacked to small rucksack. As the weather forecast was poor it was more lightly I'd be wearing gear rather than carrying it anyway. I added an extra pair of gloves and left out the sun cream.

Got a reasonably early bus in the morning so plenty of time to prepare at Ingleton. So quiet on the bus, people not asleep, just wondering what lay ahead for a long event and with poor weather still forecast. Indecision was not just with me, at Ingleton one guy had shorts on, then changed to long, then changed back to shorts. I chatted to Martin Dietrich and Ozzy Kershaw. Outside it was cool, drizzly and most started in cags, a few did have shorts on. The organiser briefed us and again mentioned the bad weather then started us off.

Quite a scramble across the playing field, through a narrowish gap, up the road and then the track on to the fells and up Ingleton. Yes, the higher we went the colder it got. I passed Carol Morgan on the ascent only to be quickly overtaken by her on the descent, steep, slippery on the grass, windy and showery. One CP down, 23 more to go. I took on a biscuit and some water at Hill Inn, then welcomed the firmer ground as the road and lane took us to the beginning of the Wherside climb.

Legs still working, but already feeling the pace, no time at all to relax with weather closing in. I'd passed Karen Nash saying I was looking forward to being grouped with her later on – she said no chance I would be much faster than her (too kind). On the descent back down Wherside I was glad to now be with Martin Dietrich who correctly kept to the wall and avoided going off the SE side. However, a bit later on I followed him too closely as he missed the giant stile taking us W to Kingsdale. Only a one minute lost after waiting for a troop behind us to get over the stile first. The chap with shorts on (shorts/longs/shorts) I'd spoken to at the start was there and said it was definitely the right decision for him.

A chap called Jim [Jim Rogers?] knew Martin and I managed to tag along with these two over Gragareth through the puddles and bog on the top, over Great Coum, Towns Fell and down to Dent.

My gloves were soaked and hands cold – not frozen; the pace was sufficient to keep me warm enough though. People at the start had been talking about Gore-Tex over gloves – something I must get. Offered a warm sausage roll I declined, topped up with water and I think it was here ate some orange segments which slipped down really well. I also liked flapjack, malt loaf and cake at various other cps. Carol was now a little way ahead then as we began ascending road and then track Jim and I over took her with Martin now

not far behind. By the time we reached Blea Moor top the snow was falling and the temperature had dropped. At the building Jim stopped to consult the map; meanwhile Carol followed by Martin overtook us and descended since they knew the route. I was pleased to get through more bog and be lower down, on the road and out of the worst of the weather. Carol set the pace and we followed, all catching up at Stonehouse, CP10.

CP10 was more than I was expecting, with heaters on, solid tent, bench to sit on, hot food (Pasta). Normally I'm in and out but as the others in our little group were resting/changing/eating/drinking I also indulged and had pasta. A few chaps were retiring. The organiser was here and told us due to the weather check point times for grouping had been brought forward. I put on over trousers. I thought Carol was the first to leave and followed her. We ascended the track and Great Knoutberry together. Julian Brown was coming up as we were coming down and Carol was most friendly acknowledging everyone in a cheery voice. Jim passed us as we were going up – how did he get ahead?

Carol was saying that she was using this as a training trip really, her main target for the year being 'The Dragon's Back'. Previous week she had done half a Bob Graham helping her man on his round. This was obviously a race that Carol enjoyed and she did say so a number of times. She asked me whether I had reced any of it to which I replied no, much to her surprise. She also asked me the same question later on and got the same answer!



Carol Morgan



Carmine De Grandis

The first of the flashing beacons welcomed us up and down the climb. A gentle traverse round to Redshaw and on the way Carol picked up a dropped mug (disqualification beckoned for the person without). At Redshaw the mug was reunited with a relieved owner. Carol also had her other half to welcome and encourage her on the way – as he did at the remaining roadside points I think.

At this point I was most pleased to have been able to stick with various people who knew the route well, although ready to navigate when needed. The clag had lifted now which was going to making navigation easier and be more inspiring too. I was now slightly ahead of Carol as we ascended over rough ground to CP13, past the source of the Ribble and onto a road. I'd caught up with Jim again and an oldish fellow and a couple of youngsters. I mistook a group of cars and radio mast for the next CP so was surprised to bypass it which we did, onto the Pennine Way and then sharp right up to the top of Dodd Fell. Jim was quick on the descent and although we followed he disappeared and the four of us went too far along the track NW. Carol was not behind. Some map reading and local knowledge and we were back heading for CP15 (Fleet Moss) where we found Carol happily munching some hot food.

The weather was now much better, I was warm in over trousers but did not want to waste time removing them whilst following Carol – who was choosing a good route. She was also now much stronger than me and I started to slip back. Eventually the elastic broke. However with the clear weather I was able to see a long way ahead and followed Carol's good route right round to Deepdale and then took my own route to CP16 on Middle Tongue, signalled in by another flashing beacon. Over trousers were off now and I felt more comfortable. NE to CP17, except I overshot and ended up too far N. After some faffing around and probably losing 15 mins I made it and enjoyed the jog down to Cray.

I was surprised to find Martin here – not sure where he had overtaken me, but plenty of opportunity. Also Julian too. They were put in the first group and off they went, it was 7:20pm. I joined in the second group with 4 others who were already there, so no time to rest, and after some introductions we jogged to the Buckden Pike climb. Oh! The others were all quicker than me and I was really feeling it now. Once the climb started I soon propped up the rear, my quads bruised from the quicker down hills earlier on. However, all the other four were really supportive. We stuck close together, they took it in turns to make sure I was not always at the back.

Carmine was a great guy to have in the group – he had an optimal route plugged in to his GPS and it worked well, especially over some of the less featured terrain in the dark. He offered me use of his poles which I did not feel like I had the energy to use – perhaps I should have tried them on the uphill. We did a minor diversion as we came in to Park Rash where, under Carmine's suggestion, we added an extra layer. I added my dry gloves. It was a good idea, especially now that we were travelling slower and the clear still night meant temp was dropping. Head torches on we could see other groups behind; the large moon added to the atmosphere. One thing this group were keen on was toilet stops. We had a few group toilets stops as well as many solo ones from Barrie – what was he drinking?

The last climb, to Great Whernside, red flashing beacons guiding us in to the CPs. Some featureless ground and we reach CP23. A further km and we're on to track and start to pick up the landing lights guiding us in to the final CP. I am unable to manage more than a shuffle, the others guys bounding along. Frost has settled on some of the stiles which were really slippery – I found out nearly to my cost. Yarnbury is reached.

It's the last chance to get the whizz sound as the chip in our round disc tally cards is registered. As it is now road to the finish the group is disbanded. Immediately everyone is off jogging away. Sorry that I cannot keep up, and a bit embarrassed that I slowed the group so much. I jog the whole way from Yarnbury to the finish, apart from a climb after the bridge. But, my jog is not as fast as others are walking – eek!

On reaching Grassington the group behind us has started to catch up. I wonder who might catch me and hope that I get in before Karen. A fast runner comes past, then another, then another. No Karen though. Through Grassington, me still jogging, and then, yes, Karen comes past. I don't believe it. She ends up finishing 1 minute ahead of me.

What an event. I queued for some food, but then cannot manage to eat it. I enjoyed a glass of milk though. Carmine has some friendly encouraging words for me which were much appreciated. I slowly slowly plod back to the car in the field, gladly climb in out of the increasingly cold night and am soon asleep.

On reflection I must say a big thanks to all the marshals, especially those not on the roadside who braved the weather and happily punched strange shapes in our tally cards. Would I do it again? – well now it is four days later I might, 4 days ago I wouldn't have. Many thanks to all the people that helped put on a great event.

Nigel Aston