

## A VIEW FROM THE BACK



Happiness before the pain

This was to be my 2nd Fellsman so I was less apprehensive than last year. I had completed so I was sure I could again and the target was to set a pb. I am sure to an outsider the start looks chaotic but the Fellsman organisers had all in hand and after the pre-run chat by Suzanne we were off. Starting nearly at the back it was interesting to see the 2 different start lines, one to right and up the steep grass slope and the other (me included) stayed flat and out onto the road. What was amusing was the number who, started by going up the slope, then changed their minds and joined us.



Listening carefully to Suzanne

Then on to the first challenge, Ingelborough. Last year I attempted to do the climb too quickly (that is quickly by my standards, not that of most others). Nothing for it but use a mix of run and walk and get to the top with enough energy to run the down. I had hoped to get to the top with a gap between me and those in front. Unfortunately a group had decided to wait at the top and had about 12 people set off just before me. The descent off Ingelborough is steep and quite technical but I must admit to enjoying it. After a couple of 'side' excursions I managed to get past those in front and had a clear run to Hill Inn check point, getting past another couple on the way.

Ugh - Whernside - it's not that I dislike the mountain, it's that when I get to the ridge I then have all those runners coming down past me. Still, eventually it is my turn and I do then enjoy it immensely all the way down to Kingsdale. Probably the last opportunity in the race for me to run freely, trying not to run too fast as I remember what is still to come and I must save some energy. A short stop at the check point, quick chat to Dick and then the ever steepening flog to Gragareth, don't think about it, just grind it out. Then it levels out and you are at the stile, have a breather and a slow jog

to the ladies at the check point and their lovely cheery greeting. About turn, deep breath, try not to think how far away Great Coum is, at least the terrain is much gentler than I have already done. It isn't that boggy so I manage to get a bit of jogging in. Then before you know it you are at the check point and starting the long descent to Dent. Refuel on hot sausages rolls which I wouldn't touch if not on this run but here they are marvellous.

The road section wasn't very kind on my feet and by now I was beginning to realise that the ground was much drier and harder than I had expected and I probably should have worn shoes with better cushioning. Last year I thought I was in danger of drowning when crossing to Blea Moor and had looked at possible alternatives but to my surprise and pleasure it was so dry that my feet hardly got wet. At the CP I realised that I might be able to get through Stonehouse before having to group up. This was where I was grouped last year and I thought it would be a psychological boost if I could go beyond this year. I managed to put on a bit of an effort and got there with just over 10 minutes to spare, so a quick bowl of much appreciated pasta and off towards Redshaw. By now there were the same people around me so it looked liked I would be grouped with some of them which should be ok as we were going at a similar pace. This year I realised that people were taking a higher line above Arten Gill Moss so decided to give it a try. The right decision and a really enjoyable route down to the Redshaw CP and a welcoming kiss from my wife who was marshalling there.



Arriving at Redshaw

Recharge the food and drink and as the wind was getting up decided to add to what I was wearing and better organise my sack for when it got dark.



The' Group'

I grouped up with Mike, Gerry and Tony and we soon found that the section up to Snaizeholme was probably the wettest so far. Not ideal to get wet feet just as it was getting colder and darker.

Ah well these things are sent to test us. The section around to Dodd Fell Hill was straightforward, any debate was about the best line up to the CP. Last year I was persuaded to go further along the track and then steeply up to the CP and found it quite tiring. This year Mike argued for a more diagonal line which although longer was at a gentler angle, I quickly agreed. By now it was nearly dark and getting more windy and cold, so some more clothing on and the descent to Fleetmoss. The descent to the road was, as with many other places on the route was so much drier that it was almost a pleasure, almost!

The warm tent at Fleetmoss was very welcoming but had to be left all too quickly after re-fuelling and putting the final layers. It was now very windy and quite cold. The first section of Fleetmoss is now relatively straightforward as there are fences and walls to act as handrails but it always seem to take forever to get to the 'blue cup'. The section from here to the CP is usually ok but there are times when the quad bike track becomes indistinct. We were saved from having to use map and compass by Mike and Gerry. Mike had his ipad mini with OS maps on it and Gerry had his GPS. I have never used an electronic system in the mountains and have been quite sceptical as to their use, but readily admit that on Fleetmoss in the dark and in very windy conditions it has a great advantage over a map and compass and it made getting to the Middle Tongue CP a lot easier. Fortunately I had done a recce up here a few weeks ago and discovered a new section of fences just SE of the CP. As I had the grid reference of the corner were able to use a combination of the electronic systems to go straight to the kink in the wall and then to the gate and track. Fleetmoss crossed and no mistakes, quite a relief. Across to Gilbert Lane the flashing beacons and the Hell Gate CP, with a very interesting tent structure housing the marshalls. It became apparent that we needed to press on to Cray as Tony was getting very cold.

As with all the CP's everything was very well organised and Tony was soon eating, being wrapped in blankets and given hot water bottles. Unfortunately despite all this attention he felt unable to continue and decided to retire. Fortunately for us another group arrived soon after us with 1 of their number unable to continue so we were able to join up to form a group of 6. So with no more ado set off for Buckden Pike. I find Buckden Pike hard in daylight but at this point in the Fellsman it was for me very testing, added to the fact that we went up the right side of the gill, which I believe is more difficult than the left, meant that I was disappointingly slow. The other 5 were very patient and I am very grateful to them. Once it levelled out I got a new lease of life and with dawn we were able to go along at a decent pace through Top Mere and onto Park Rash. After refuelling we were able to ungroup which was a relief to me as I knew I would be slow going up to Great Whernside. Mike and Gerry decided that my pace was ok for them so we steadily climbed great Whernside to the CP. From here to Yarnbury there aren't any navigational problems it is just a matter of grinding it out and with Mike and Gerry for company this was no real hardship. I was keeping an eye on the time and it looked possible to improve on last year's time, and as it was the first time for both of them they assured me their priority was to finish. The weather was sunny but still very windy and cold and despite our tiredness we weren't making bad time, and pleasingly were able to catch and overtake a couple of groups.

The rest is just a road flog down through, to my surprise, a deserted Grassington and up to the school to be greeted by a hug and kiss from Karen, who very kindly organised a seat for me and got my meal and a very welcome cup of tea, in fact several. A slight downside, I misread my Garmin so we were 2 minutes over 25hours rather than just under, but what the heck I beat last year's time by over 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> hours.



That tea was wonderful . In reality perhaps a grimace rather than a smile, but pleased with a reduced pb

I would like to record my gratitude to everyone who gave of their time to organise the event. I am grateful that they insist on us carrying all that clothing, I had all mine on overnight and through to the finish. A special thanks to those gave of their time to marshall the race and especially those on the high CP's where for a long time they were buffeted by a very cold wind, suffered from interrupted sleep, if in fact they got any and yet were always extremely cheerful. Many, many thanks.