

Fellsman 2009

2009 was the 47th year of the “Fellsman Hike” – organized by Keighley Scout Service Team. It was the longest race I’ve ever entered... so why?? The Fellsman race is part of the 2009 Runfurther Vasque UK ultra-running series and to me it sounded like a really tough personal challenge and I had picked it out as a race to focus on this year. I knew enough of its reputation to be under no doubt it would be tough & knowing lots of the route is not even on paths, it sounded like it would be hard going underfoot. Oh and that it is 62 miles long, with 11,000ft of ups & downs....

So I took up the challenge, and gathered in Ingleton with 383 starters on a bright but overcast May morning. The route loops round the Yorkshire Dales taking in lots of Yorkshire summits (10 I think) and finishing in the village of Threshfield, near Grassington.



The race is fantastically well organized; there are 24 checkpoints around the route; and some of the marshals on the summits did a fantastic job of staying cheery despite the weather. At many of the road crossings there are big checkpoints with tents with heaters going, hot tea and hot food. Despite the mileage, you can’t really go hungry on this race as the food provision was fantastic – bowls of pasta & sauce, hot cheese pastries, rice pudding, soup & tea all went down well – along with a large number of custard creams at regular intervals. I didn’t stop too long in any one checkpoint, but all the marshals were great and very welcoming.

– the first bit was to Dent – a good few hills, but all on paths. There is a short out-and-back section on the way up/down Whernside so it was nice to see a few faces I recognized as the field was spreading out.



I split the route up in my head into 3 sections really. Descending in to the village of Dent you know that you have done quite a bit of the days climbing, for me getting there in 4 hours worked well. In Dent I finally caught up with fellow Macclesfield Harrier Julian Brown, and as I was leaving the food tent, Julian joined me and it was very nice to have company and we stayed together for the rest of the day. I think we both helped each other keep going on different sections so that was great.

After leaving Dent there is a few miles along the road and then back on to the hills – I knew that I wanted to try and get beyond the night grouping point at Cray

before 7.30pm – so 6 hours for the section to Cray was my aim which seemed realistic. As we headed up to Blea Moor the heavy rain began, but for me it was worst as I climbed Great Knoutberry. I just about had visibility on the way down to head across the moorland & down to the checkpoint at Redshaw (half way) & just as I was thinking that I was starting to get a bit too cold, the sun came back out and then for the rest of the day the weather stayed calm.

So good to be setting out on the second half in better weather – in fact we could now see all the summits. I knew the infamous Fleets Moss was still to come, but my legs weren't feeling too bad and the custard creams seemed to be doing the job! It was very nice to see my husband Dave cheering me on at the Fleets Moss checkpoint, but we couldn't linger... we had a large bog to cross!



There were definitely a variety of route choices being made – but everyone seemed to be making it to the trig point at Middle Tongue somehow. After the trig point we wallowed in mud a bit, but then crossed the fence to pick up a faint quad bike track which Steve Watts had showed me on a recent reccie – that save us a big of bog sinking I think –although hard to tell as I completely lost track of who had been in front/behind us. I did then have a hard bit of the race for me, as I had been second lady since Dent, but at Hell's Gap checkpoint Nicky Spinks appeared from somewhere (maybe a better route over Fleets Moss??) so I felt I had to try and keep

up. We did get past the Cray checkpoint at 7.20pm so that was a plus point for me and I felt fairly on track with my timing. But I couldn't keep up with Nicky' speed and strength & as Julian kindly put in, in a 62-mile race you do have to just run how you feel – and once Nicky had speeded off I relaxed a bit more and yes I think continued to enjoy it. I was quite relaxed about getting grouped at Park Rash – Julian & I only had a few minutes to wait before others turned up behind us, and then there were suddenly loads of people. We set off in a 5 and another 4 rapidly chased us down – making us a 9 for most of the last moorland section – mind you we were all working hard so I didn't really chat! We had set off about 9pm so got up to the top of Great Whernside before it was too dark, so the end bit in the dark was fine - the route was aided by beacons and also a very picturesque moon-rise. The final 2 miles on the road weren't quite as bad as I had feared – Julian & I finished together in 14 hours 22mins so I was very pleased with my time. I ended up finishing as 3rd lady, half an hour behind the 1st lady Sarah Rowell and 25th overall – out of a total 238 finishers. Jez Bragg won overall in a great time of 10 hours and 50 minutes.

It was good to get wet socks off and have a nice hot shower & the team in the school kitchen were there throughout the night to provide chili/breakfast for all the finishing "hikers". It was good to get some sleep and have a lazy breakfast before prize giving at 10am on Sunday. Sunday was spent mainly not moving much – the Sunday roast at the nearby Tennants Arms pub (Kilnsey) was a great finish to a challenging but rewarding weekend.

See www.fellsman.org for details for next year, or www.runfurther.com to find out about other ultra races in the UK.

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