

Lakeland 100: 2009

“The Lakeland 100 (UTLD) 2009 took place on the weekend of July 31st-August 2nd and is reported to be the most spectacular long distance trail race which has ever taken place within the UK.

The circular route encompasses the whole of the lakeland fells, includes in the region of 6300m of ascent and consists entirely of public bridleways and footpaths. The lakeland route starts in Coniston in Cumbria and heads South before completing a clockwise loop which takes in the Dunnerdale fells, Eskdale, Wasdale and Buttermere before arriving in Keswick. From here, the route heads to Matterdale and continues over to Haweswater before returning via Kentmere, Ambleside and Elterwater to the finish at Coniston.” (www.lakeland100.com)

So I knew it was going to be a big challenge. I had been on a long day out in January and had completed the Coniston to Keswick section; I had a really nice day and it tempted me to enter the race. I completed the Fellsman (62miles) in May this year, but this would be my longest ever race, and I wasn't too sure what to expect – would my legs keep going?

My parents gave me a lift up to Coniston on Friday morning as they were going to spend the weekend cheering me on. I spent a really nervous afternoon trying to read a book, drink tea & relax, but by the time the start came I was a bundle of nerves! So it was good to get going at 7.30pm – about 100 runners set off through Coniston and up towards the slate mines & the Walna Scar road. It was a drizzly start, but the rain was to get much worse later. The first checkpoint was in Seathwaite and then we headed off on the route that the Duddon fell race takes. As we approached Harter Fell the headtorches came out to negotiate



the boggy woodland paths. I knew the route so was leading a small group. By the time we got down to Boot it was really dark and the rain had begun to get heavier. I knew that heading over to Wasdale Head the paths would be vague so I had my map & compass out and managed to keep us on a good route. Good flapjacks at the checkpoint in Wasdale and then off up the big climb over Black Sail Pass. The wind was really blowing at the top & I headed down to the youth hostel as quickly as possible – not that quickly on all the wet slippy rock! By the time I got to the youth hostel I was just with one other guy – we had chatted a bit earlier and he told me he was from Lithuania. As we climbed Scarth Gap Pass together he said the highest mountain in Lithuania is 252 m – this race was going to be quite a challenge then! (I was pleased to find out on Sunday he did make it round OK). I knew the navigation from Buttermere would be a bit tricky, this time I was aided by others around with a GPS & we got on the right path down to Braithwaite OK. Some welcome rice pudding & pasta (I did wonder if it was Ok to eat them in the wrong order?) and after 5mins or so I was ready to head out of the door into the slow dawn.

As I ran along the main road I met up with Drew, who became my running buddy for the rest of the race. We also joined another runner (who was pacing himself well as he finished 5th) and we ran together as a 3 for a few hours. The rain was lighter & I was considering taking my waterproofs off, but as we climbed up to the stone on the Cumbrian way near Blencathera there

were still some showers. A quick stop at Blencathera & a quick call to let my husband know I was doing well and to expect me in Dalemain at my “early” estimate. Then it was a climb up to the old coach road and then 6 miles along the track to Dacre. It was nice heading towards Dalemain with views of Ullswater & knowing I had made good time to the “half” way point (nearer 60 miles). My husband & parents were there to cheer me on at Dalemain & I put dry clothes on & had a good amount of food.



Dalemain – about 60 miles in

Anyway, couldn't stop for long and headed off in the sunshine – now wearing my shorts & t-shirt which was nice. I think this was the best bit of the race with views of Ullswater and then Haweswater. As Drew and I passed High Knop Martin & Martin, who were leading the 50 mile race, bounded past yelling “Go Team Vasque!”, followed by the other fast 50-mile runners. Lucy passed us as we started on the contouring path along Haweswater. I knew the path along the lake had felt long in my reccie but it did seem to go on for ages! Heading up and over Gatescarth Pass lots of the 50-mile competitors passed – everyone was very encouraging so that was great.



The best quote was “you're my heros!” – which was nice – I didn't feel very heroic later on! The rocky descents were hard work and I was flagging a bit getting to Kentmere. But a welcome Smoothie was excellent & it was onwards again – now Ambleside was the focus.

Arriving in Ambleside we did get a cheer from the pub beer garden, as well as a big cheer from the group of supporters outside LakesRunner. Inside for some tea & a sandwich – unfortunately my stomach wasn't quite so keen on the idea of proper food so I spent 10mins sat outside trying to calm my tummy down. This was the first point I suddenly wondered if I could do it – I didn't like not feeling in control, but fortunately I picked myself up & Drew was waiting ready to carry on. We set off hoping to everyone at the finish in maybe 4 hours (it actually took us another 6 or so) -- the last 15miles were pretty tough for me. As we left Ambleside it began to get dark & started raining again.

I was pleased that I had reccied the route so that helped – we made good progress to the Chapel Stile checkpoint. Then it was hard work going along Langdale – I thought it couldn't be that far but it seemed to take ages & I felt I was really stumbling a lot on the rocky paths. But we got there & up & over to Blea Tarn was OK. Finding the best route down to the road was a bit tricky in the dark & all the bracken but we made it & were close with some other people again. One more up & over before the final checkpoint. We were keen to finish so carried straight on up the steps to the quarry, knowing there was a big group of people behind. We made the mistake of agreeing to follow all the other headtorches as I was worried about the last bit of navigation – we did end up a bit off course which was frustrating, but the group in front got sorted before I could get my compass out and apply my tired brain – the path was spotted and we were through the gap and on to the final descent. As we hit the track Drew said it was 3am – if we could do the last bit OK (probably less than a mile) we would make under 32 hours – so somehow managed a bit of a jog & even got up some speed on the last bit of road.... In to the finish in 31 hours 47 minutes to be met by my husband and parents – I think it was relief all round!!



Andy Rankin won the race in a new course record of 22 hours 46 min. I finished 16th overall as first lady, setting the inaugural women's course record. There were about 40 finishers out of about 100 starters... so goes to show it is a pretty tough race. Thanks very much to the race organizers & all the marshals/checkpoint staff who were up all weekend & also thanks to my parents & husband to their support cheering me on over the weekend too.

Rachael Lawrance 6th August 2009