

How to Get Round Wasdale When You Probably Shouldn't

By Lauren Jeska

What a year it's been! After some promising runs in January and February, everything started going wrong, and come the start of April I couldn't run at all due to serious fatigue problems. The recovery process was slow, and even in June training runs seemed to go badly as often as they went well. I'd cut my race plans for the year down to the English Championships, and had a Wasdale entry - so, to go for it or not? Still undecided, I reccied the route with Ben and Louise. Some energy drink revived me from the inevitable energy-crash (inevitable even at a slow reccying pace!), convincing me I could get round on race day, maybe not fast but I'd get there, and between us we'd make sure we got a women's team round!

So, on to race day, and Alastair starts it off by arriving a few minutes early, never a good plan as I'm still running around trying to sort everything out! Left behind are one mobile phone and one set of housekeys for my visit to Lancaster, oops. But I remember everything else, and James Logue (who drives us to Wasdale) and Alastair have a clever plan to leave drinks on the race route near the road, so we can collect them after the descent from Whin Rigg. Ben and Dan are also with us in the car; James and Alastair poke the usual fun at Dan and me for the amount of kit we're carrying. Dan's pack was pretty hefty! And I've left two bottles of carefully flattened Dr Pepper by the road. However, it's a long race, and don't let anyone put you off carrying the food and drink you want to carry, especially from runners who're likely to finish the race an hour or more ahead of most of us. Registration and I get landed with number 118, just what I needed to make my day brighter..

Off to the race start and on a hot day it's very steady going up the first climb, a bit of conversation but not as much as I was expecting! Outdoing any of us for heavy packs are 10 army commandos who thought they'd show us how tough they are by running the race in army kit, boots and carrying 10Kg rucksacks; they don't make it past Seatallan. CVFR's Clare Kenny asks me why I'm going so slowly, I tell her I'm taking it easy and just hoping to get round. As the hill levels off I pick up my pace a little, around me people are running a slow pace that's just a waste of energy for me, I want to run that little bit faster, otherwise walking's better. Near the top, and I find a snake of runners have tagged along behind me, and before I know it they all shoot off down the hill. Without me!

The first descent, and the first big surprise of the day - I can't descend at all. Forget about my fast descent on the reccy, it now feels like my quads have vanished, and the best I can do is a strange waddle down the hill. All manner of people overtake me before I reach the valley. It's going to be a long day! But nevermind, I pick up my bottles, one goes in my pack and I drink the other while chatting to Dan on the way to Greendale. Some friendly

faces at the road provide a welcome boost, and then it's the steady climb to Seatallan, thankful as the air cools away from the valley. Near the top I'm chatting to another CVFR runner, Linda Murgatroyd. After the checkpoint I leave her behind, and as it's a clear day find the best path over towards Pillar. Looking back to see where she was, I can only see a few runners behind me before the line, ominously, stops. For the first time the thought of cut-off times enters my mind. There's not much to be done about it (I don't even have a watch!), and I keep up a reasonable pace but don't start rushing or panicking. Before Scoat Fell I've passed someone, and he's shouting to me from the col, 'Where are you going?' He seems to be aiming his compass straight off a large drop towards Pillar, maybe looking for an invisible bridge. I helpfully shout back, 'This way!' He follows me round and does well on the climb, reaching Pillar just ahead of me.

So, I've made it to the checkpoint. 'What time is it?' I ask. The answer is 3.23, so I've only made it by a couple of minutes. Fortunately I've psyched myself up for weeks that the race is easy once you reach Pillar, and whether this is actually true or not, the result is I'm buoyant and confident that I'll get to Great Gable in time. The same can't be said for anyone else - around me is an ocean of despondency. First I catch up a Wharfedale runner. It's Tamara Hird, and she's beaten me by one place in every championship race so far. But not this time. I try to encourage her to push to reach Gable in time, but she replies that she's got nothing left and can't make it. Another runner interjects, 'Do you think it's possible to get there in time?' It's compass guy again. With absolute certainty I say 'Yes,' and off I go. I don't think he made it. Ahead is Andrew Bibby, also struggling and given up. I leave them all behind and carry on.

Next is the stream where I was going to refill my pack with water plus powder, but given the time pressure I pull out my second bottle of Dr Pepper. Drinking through a tube has in any case proved to be hard work, leaving me out of breath - the problem with Inov8's horizontal system is you have to suck the water up further than with other camelbacks. The bottle, however, works a treat, and Dr Pepper is perfect for replenishing energy, I can truly say it got me round Wasdale! Next is the traverse behind Kirk Fell. Me 'n Cleator-le-Moor's Katy have a brief conversation, all the men around us having seemingly given up. White red and blue, she thought I was the 'Wharfedale Girl' at first. 'Nah, she's gone,' I reply. I ask her if she thinks we'll make it (I'm going faster than her at this point, and she's going faster than all the men). 'Should do if we keep up a steady pace, we've got 40 mins.' I relax and keep up my pace.

And there, at Beck Head, is .. everyone! Including Ben, which confuses me at first, before it sinks in that various

people have dropped out. Jane accompanies me up to great Gable, and as ever I'm enjoying the big rocks, although my attempt at a short uphill sprint sets off some cramp. I can even see Skinz and Dan! And sure enough, I make it to the checkpoint with 3 minutes to spare! At this point I could have climbed and climbed, but unfortunately the next bit is steep downhill, and crippling. Katy shoots past, too fast for me to manage a reply, 'Oh, and you were doing so well!' She'd made the cut-off by 30 seconds or so, and very quickly regained the two minutes I'd pulled out on her over the ascent. When she caught Dan, he asked her where I'd got to, to be told 'She's struggling with the descent.' Too right!

Eventually I reach Sty Head, and a few more supporters offering me jelly babies and drinks and I can't remember what else. I sit down for a bit, and refill my water pack at a stream. BUT! Don't mix your drinks, and don't ever have anything with orange squash in it! At least there's a comfortable rock to sit on while I'm gagging and throwing up everything I've just managed to get down, a Helm Hill runner looks a bit concerned, but as soon as it's over I'm on my feet, and running strongly now that we're going uphill again. Another runner I catch tags along and we talk on the way towards Scafell. He's stressing over such a slow time, but I tell him 'half an hour up, and half an hour down from here,' which makes him a bit happier, (he finished only 5 minutes outside my prediction - way ahead of me, of course!). As the last rise comes into view I give him some more hints - it's not as bad as it looks, it's over really quickly. It turns out he's a Keswick runner, you'd think he'd know that kind of thing! Not for the first time, Dan's shouts echo around the mountain, 'Come on 118!'

The last climb might be good, but the slight downhill before it doesn't work so well for me, and the others disappear. What comes next is round two of paroxysms of gagging and choking, even though I haven't tried to eat or drink anything more. Some passing pedestrians look quite concerned. Then it's over and I'm off again, feeling better for it. The relief at reaching Scafell Pike is tempered by foreknowledge of the descent to come. On the tourist path are plenty of people, some of them three-peakers, but soon it's off on the grass towards Lingmell Nose, and it turns into a lonely descent. There's no-one in sight, and after the Helm Hill guy overtakes me I think I could be the last runner in the race. I've never felt so exposed in a race, partly because of the gagging and choking - which happens sometimes at home or in the street - and which feels potentially life-threatening (at the time of writing this is thankfully no longer happening). The descent is painfully slow. Eventually I reach the final checkpoint, and promptly sit down to have a chat, which turns out to be a good move as I tell them which route I'm planning to take to Wasdale Head, and they suggest the better plan of actually heading for the finish of the race, which is in plain sight the other way. My legs simply don't work downhill and it's incredibly tiring, nothing to do with the long race as my legs were already useless coming off Whin rigg. First I watch a runner coming down the

hill, pass me, and proceed to the finish. It feels like I haven't moved at all! Shortly afterwards I'm so tired I sit down for a rest, 3 minutes from the end! At least I set one record for the day, the slowest time for the last stage!

So to the end, and to finally find out what's happened to everyone else! Louise, I'm told, made the cut-offs, so I loudly exclaimed, 'If I'd known that I wouldn't have bothered!' Maybe that's not entirely true, as third counter I wasn't going to let the team down no matter how badly I felt, but I wanted to do it for myself as well. No sooner have I been told she's still in than she runs across the finish line! I'm surprised as I thought I was the last person to make it through from Seatallan and Pillar, and apart from Louise, I was - well done Louise on a stellar run to reach Gable in time. Loads of the men, however, have dropped out, including Ben and James from our carload on the way up. Andy Mc drives me and Dan back, and goes to the trouble of dropping me to the door in Lancaster where I'm visiting - thank you Andy, much needed. The next two days find me feeling ill and dehydrated, with a sore mouth, all of which eventually improves on Monday afternoon. My muscles, however, are not particularly sore as they haven't been worked hard and fast, and my blisters are about the same as usual!

Well done Kath and Skinz for fantastic runs, and Louise for getting round - I didn't see her once in the race, and we finished less than two minutes apart! Many thanks to everyone who was up there supporting, with special mentions for: Alastair, James and Andy Mc for lifts, Lousie and Ben for a wonderful day reccying, and Dan for shouting 'Come on 118!' all the way round, as if Wasdale wasn't a tough enough challenge already!

On behalf of Stainland Lions I would like to thank you for your recent attendance at the Stainland 7, the amount of runners from local clubs such as Todmorden is helping us to grow The Stainland 7 each year.

We hope you all enjoyed the race and would appreciate any feedback you might have.

The event will take place next year on Sunday 5th September and we hope that you will be able to include this in your Grand Prix again.

Gavin Dodd