

WASDALE FELL RACE

Its January 2004, its cold, damp and after a lot of persuasion I'm stood in the Masons car park awaiting my first pack run. Having run only a little by myself before this is a daunting night. After running for what seems like an eternity I begin chatting to another new runner Mark Goldie, and we both come to a similar decision that to run at the pack runs and maybe a few local races would do us and to get any better was not an issue. B*ll**cks!! It didn't take too long to be bitten by the bug.

Several months later after lots of talk at the pack runs of getting as many club members at the English championships, I started the task of sending off my pre-entries to the various races, really just to see what it was all about. Enter first, think later, not a smart move I thought as I got confirmation of my entry into the Wasdale fell race.

As never having been to Wasdale before it was a bit of a shock to see the "hills" that surrounded the valley, which was probably the most scenic area I have ever seen before.

After a couple of nights of restless sleep under canvas (mainly due to Sharons digestive gases) and about 10lbs of porridge I find myself walking up to start line.

I start to run through the list in my mind, drink, have I got enough?
Food, is it the right type?
Will I be too warm with my underwear on?
My mind starts to wander.

We are at last ready to go and the reality of it all begins to set in, it must be 25 degrees and I am about to attempt 21 miles and 9000 feet, maybe I should hide in the nearby ferns and say I missed the start! Too late we are off and I'm dragged off up the path by 250 other runners. Having been known to set off a little quick in some fell races I purposely set off very steady with only completion on my mind.

The first climb up to Illgill is steep enough and this is only the beginning. As I reach the summit I get a chance to have a quick look around, what spectacular views of the race route greet me and worry me!

The first checkpoint comes up and then a descent into Greendale, which I find surprisingly hard at such an early stage in the race. The run through Greendale is relatively flat and shaded as we run under trees, a nice break from the sun. Even better was the drinks station at the foot of the climb to

Seatallan, where I catch my first sight of the great Joss Naylor, very inspiring.

The ascent to Seatallan begins on a well-walked path but soon changes to wet boggy grass, which is a slight relief for my hot feet. Soon this climb is over and there is now a little downhill and level running and plenty of streams where I drink and soak my hat.

Then the climb up to Pillar where somewhere around here I take an unnecessary climb, which I was warned about before the start, the only consolation is that I am not the only one as several runners follow me, to whom I am very apologetic too.

We drop down too Blacksail now and my disgruntled followers decide it better to chance their own luck and vanish into the distance, a wise move.

A slight shudder as I see Kirkfell but soon realise that we are contouring around it via a much welcoming stream. As we round Kirkfell the imposing mound of Gable comes into sight, I know we are not contouring this one. At its base I take a quick glimpse upwards, it seems from here like a nearly vertical wall of shale and rock, surely even goats would struggle on this!!

After what seems like an age I reach the summit and the final paths can be seen so spirits lifted I head off down to Styhead pass where I meet welcoming faces but not welcoming comments about having only one more climb to do but it is only the highest mountain in England! Phil Hodgson does not get my vote as club morale officer!

The next path is easy underfoot but long and here I start to feel surprisingly refreshed and start to pass a few people on my way up to the summit of Scafell. From here I feel like I have a new pair of legs until I reach the final descent at Lingmell where I instantly find out what a steep descent can do to you at this stage in a race, I must have looked like I'd had 10 pints coming down this part, but as it levelled out I began to regain control of my legs.

Crossing the finish line was a feeling to remember, and I don't think I came down to earth for a few days. It puzzles me as to how something so demanding can be so rewarding, it is probably why I have become so addicted to the sport.

Next year I hope to be stood on the start line again and hopefully there will be more Toddies stood there to experience what I did at the finish line (no not Jon Wright throwing up)

Shaun Godsman