

# PHIL'S JOS NAYLOR CHALLENGE – May 5, 2007

What a day! In the weeks up to the big day I'd been visualising the feeling of sprinting down into Greendale and getting there under the 12 hours. As I'd imagined it would be with 10 minutes or so to spare it still hasn't sunk in that I got so close to 11 hours – all the training and the three week rest obviously paid off.

I set off from Pooley Bridge with Shaun Godsman and Geoff Davies in support. The 11:34 schedule was going to be tight but I definitely felt up for it. For the first time in months my legs didn't feel heavy, no doubt a combination of the rest and the adrenalin. We ran much of the way to the first summit and found we'd shaved 6 minutes off the schedule with only a few miles gone. A slight worry that I might be going off too quickly was outweighed by the fact that I was feeling great. "Run how you feel" I told myself. My other worry was the clag. Mist cloaked the hills from Arthur's Pike onwards but my reccies, and the directions provided courtesy of John Crummett, with his remarkable recall for every twist, turn and shortcut, kept us on track, with the additional comfort factor of a GPS back up. The first leg, the most runnable section of the challenge, passed in a flash, as we ticked off High Street and the other 10 summits and cruised down the last hill to reach Kirkstone Pass 10 minutes up. Mandy and Keith had the hot drinks and butties ready. John Preston and Rhys Watkins were warming up ready to take me over leg 2 with Shaun doing a second leg as bagman.

Leg 2 might be the shortest leg but the ascents of Red Screes, Hart Crag, Fairfield and Seat Sandal add up to a fair old climb. My one mistake had been reaching for a pork pie as we set off. One bite and my taste buds revolted. I spit it out and handed it to Shaun. His mistake was eating it. We could both taste it as it repeated on us for the next hour. Maybe that's what caused both calves to cramp up as I slipped coming off Red Screes? I rarely get cramp and managed to run through it with gritted teeth, haunted by the sobering thought that it could ruin my chances. However, the copious amounts of carbo drink and water continually on offer from my crew slowly eased the pain. Having zig-zagged down off Seat Sandal it had reduced to a slight twinge as we reached our support team at Dunmail Raise having taken another couple of minutes off the schedule.

With the clag still well down I might have got worried when I saw Dave Makin and Tash Fellowes busy poring over a map checking out the leg 3 route, but I knew they'd already worn a new trod across to High Raise with all the reccing they'd done. You really don't need a GPS when you've got Dave navigating. With Chris Preston and John Thompson making up the four man crew Dave led an im-



Phil being congratulated by Joss Naylor

peccable line over Steel Fell and across to High Raise. More supporters fed us the obligatory crisp butties on Rossett Pike. My first bad spell of the day was going up Bowfell. I remembered the dreaded spaced out sickly feeling from the Bob Graham and other long distance events but this time it didn't seem as bad. The secret is to eat and drink when you don't feel like eating and drinking and the teams on every leg were determined to make sure I did. Every half hour they cajoled and persuaded, "Come on, eat this", "Have some water", "Here Phil, have some fudge", "Come on, get this gel down yer neck", ... and it worked. The gels in particular. Bounty bars were my secret weapon on the BG, this time it was Go Gels (impolitely referred to as sperm sachets by some in the know). The dizziness soon receded and by Esk Pike I felt good again. Reaching the summit of Great End, the clag lifted for the first time and inspired by the stunning views we managed to knock another 8 minutes off the schedule in the next 2 km as we careered down semi-suicidal gullies from the top of Great End down to Styhead Pass. Another merry band of supporters cheered us in. Dave Wilson had staggered up there loaded with spare clothes, food and drink despite being poorly. We were half an hour up, I could hardly believe it. "There's still a long way to go", I was reminded, "and the hills get bigger from here." I



Some of the support crew

I took a few extra minutes rest in the sunshine before the long pull up Gable with Ozzy Kershaw, Mick Howard, Tony Shandley and Dave in support. Ozzy led us on a great line off Gable down a scree and as we approached Jos's Gully on Kirk Fell we heard a shout as Mandy, Janet, Keith, and Rhys jogged over to cheer us on and offer encouraging hugs. (not Keith and Rhys I hasten to add in a very deep voice!) Despite another bad spell up Pillar we were holding on to our half an hour's leeway and when we reached Scoat Fell with well over 2 hours left to go we knew it was in the bag. "Just keep it steady", they encouraged, "Lift those feet, no tripping." A quick out and back over

Steeple and a grassy plod up Haycock was followed by another exhilarating scree run. Ozzy and Dave, being just a tad competitive, created a mini dust storm as they raced each other down in best kamikaze style. I took it a little more sedately. We ran the lovely little trod over the Pots of Ashness before making the long steep ascent of Seatallan. We finally saw the last summit of Middle Fell to the Southeast. "One more to go" I grinned. As we raced down the path from Middle Fell towards Jos's house in Greendale we could hear whoops and cheers as we were spotted. The gnawing pain in my quads evaporated temporarily as the last adrenalin rush of the day provided a final surge of energy. I sprinted the last metres to the Bridge to touch the parapet. I'd done it! Bloody hell, I'd actually enjoyed most of it as well. 11 hours 2 minutes, I could hardly believe it. Mandy hugged me, "You were awesome", she told me. She's my inspiration. I was amazed to see half the support team there to welcome me in. And, Jos Naylor himself was there waiting to congratulate me. He still looks the business at 74. "Well done lad", he shook my hand, "Tha's done well, that's a fast time", he beamed, "only a minute slower than mine".

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One of the highlights of such challenges is the teamwork and camaraderie before, during and after the event. It makes it a very different experience to a normal fell race. You've got to do the running, you've got to get your head round it and keep focused on the goal but you're very reliant on the team to make it happen on the day. It's a humbling experience to have everyone rooting for you, encouraging you and responding to your every whim. So, my thanks to the team who made it happen for me - you know who you are - you were magnificent.

**PHIL HODGSON**

