

The Lakeland 50

Report by David Gould

This weekend saw me achieve a Personal Furthest*, beating the 45 or so miles of the Test Way by a few miles and my previous longest race, the Compton 40, by a full 10. Indeed, like the Compton 40, the temperature soared and cover was hard to come by. Unlike the Compton 40 or the Test Way, the Lakeland 50 has prodigious amounts of climbing, much of it quite steep, so there was going to be a lot of walking involved.

It was hard to make an informed estimate beforehand of how long it would take but Lulu (my running partner) and I had completed a well-organised official recce about a month before in an aggregate time of about 13 hours split over the weekend, so I thought 16 to 18 hours would be reasonable. A finish time of 15:58, particularly given the conditions, was very gratifying. It couldn't have been achieved without the support of the informal team that accreted over the length of the race. So, to Lulu, Paul, Sharon and Ricky - a big Thank You.

Paul has well described the great organisation and gruesome track surfaces, so I shall confine myself to a few random observations.

Who needs trainers?

The list of mandatory equipment adds significantly to the weight of the pack. Unlike many events I've done with an equipment list, they actually check you have it on this one. Admittedly, it was the day before, so you could (plausibly but stupidly) ditch it overnight and run lighter. No, before you ask: I didn't.

The extra equipment might have slowed us down a tiny, tiny amount, but a bigger effect was probably the time lost to conversations that started along the lines of "Vibram FiveFingers? how are your feet?" Lulu and I were both wearing the "barefoot running" FiveFingers models with the slightly thicker (4mm as opposed to 2mm) sole with a few knobbly bits for extra grip. They aren't desperately grippy on mud, but not desperately bad either. Certainly they are much, much lighter than even lightweight trainers. And, as for how our feet were: I only have the slightest hint of one blister after 50 miles on hard rocks and not wearing any socks. Lulu faired nearly as well, with a few sore spots. Kicking rocks is a bit more exhilarating than when more robustly shod, but it's good to have something to complain about now and then. Overall, I'm not getting rid of my FiveFingers: on the contrary, I've put all my trainers in the charity bin and won't be getting any more.†

Heatstroke

Just before meeting Paul at Mardale Head, Lulu had been pushing on hard--too hard for me--so I'd requested a slackening of the pace. She was dead

* strictly speaking, not true: when a student, I'd completed one LDWA 100-mile walk, and several walks of over 50 miles. The Lakeland 50 was the longest since I started running

† Terry Conway, who won the 100 and improved his previous time by an amazing 5 hours is also a fan – [see his blog](#)

chuffed: normally, I am a bit quicker than her. The heat was getting to me; I was starting to feel that I was being cooked, and not just from the sun: I suspected that the pace, too, had brought my internal temperature up. We were well short of half way at that point, so I put my ego to one side and we continued at a pace I could tolerate.

One small mystery is why, with a lot of people suffering heat-induced nausea, I managed to avoid it while clearly being affected by the heat. Both Lulu and Paul, at various points, felt quite nauseous. They had both been drinking "isotonic" fluids whereas I had only water in my camelbak and jelly babies in my pocket: I relied on the foods at the checkpoints for salty stuff. Indeed, Mardale Head's salty soup revitalised me. At least, I felt better afterwards, which might just have been because we had a decent rest there. I had thought that my failure to pack sports drinks was a mistake but now I'm not so sure. I should, though, have had some sort of salty stuff on me but I shall keep it separate from my water in future and see how it goes.

Navigation

The organisers provide a detailed route description, a plasticised map, GPS files to download and the advice that you should use all of them "and common sense". In the event, the description worked well; the map stayed firmly in the backpack; the GPS only came out at night; and it turns out that common sense is in short supply when you are fatigued, stressed and keen for it all to be over.

With hindsight, following the guy who'd admitted he messed up his own recce just a few days before was probably A Bad Move. He took us through a bog that would have been much better avoided and could have been, if only I'd had my GPS working. Ironically, that was one of only two points where I had thought that I would need to rely on it, but it hadn't appeared to be working a little earlier, so it was turned off to save the battery. Shortly after, I had the GPS on and working, and managed to persuade the team that running off downhill, when we should be going uphill, (on the say-so of someone who might have been the same Master Navigator that got us in the bog) was Another Bad Move and we were sorted for the rest of the run - just keep the little triangle on the line and we were doing fine.

Heroes

Perhaps the least-sung heroes of the hour were the marshals - hours spent looking after us, checking we look OK to go on and being, throughout it all, friendly and welcoming.

Of our motley band, Paul and Ricky stood out for both contemplating, several times, dropping out but ultimately pulling through. Ricky had never visited the Lakes before and announced that, if he'd seen it beforehand, he'd not even have started. Although he'd run 50s, they were all relatively flat.

We passed a number of Lakeland 100 runners during the event. Whenever we saw a number with a yellow background (ours were white), we tried to be encouraging. Many of them were looking very, very tired and barely dragging themselves along. One said "it hurts: don't do it" (it didn't seem to be stopping him). One, about 4 miles from the end, admitted that his legs were OK unless

he tried to do anything too brutal to them: he jogged past us about half a mile from the end, and didn't look as though he was going to be caught again (he wasn't).

I don't know how they did it. If I wore one, I'd take my hat off to them. And, as for Hardley's very own Hero, huge kudos to Sue, who conquered the 105 (sic) miles and all but one of the other ladies, in an amazing 30 hours.

Silly Idea

Before the event, I had been toying with the idea of entering the 100 next year.

During the event, at more than a few points, I was really, really sure that I wouldn't even be coming back to do the 50 again. Possibly, I'd never visit the Lakes again. Ever.

After the event - even before I'd got far into the school hall - I was answering the "see you next year?" question with "oo, yes - I should think so".

I'm not sure that I'll be back onto contemplating the 100 for 2012: one of our friends from Longparish walked the entire 50 in 14:32, so there's a job of work to be done there.

The 100 in 2013? Well, I'm not definitively saying no.

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