

Great Lakes Run – June 15th 2013, 21km/2130m



A relatively new race, compared with many of the classic Lake District races, but already with a reputation for being a tough day out, this race manages to pack in more metres of ascent per kilometre than any other race in the English fell race calendar. An English championship race taking place elsewhere on the same day, and possibly a weather forecast that included gusts of storm force and heavy showers meant that we were only 55 starters, a hard core of Lake District fell runners – and me!

We set off up the Band, a ridge leading up towards the summit of Bowfell. As we got higher we disappeared into the heavy cloud that covered the tops above about 500m. The wind was strong – though not storm force – and it was time to put on jacket, buff and gloves.

The Band

It was hard rocky terrain from Bowfell to the next summits of Esk Pike, Great End and Scafell Pike. With navigation tricky in the mist I tried to stay with other runners, although I tended to be a bit slower on the rough descents.



Bowfell summit – not the easiest running terrain!

From Scafell Pike I followed a small group of runners down towards the next checkpoint at Foxes Tarn. Things seemed to be going well when suddenly I stumbled on a rock, and down I went. I got up again – nothing seemed to be broken but I had banged my knee painfully on a rock. I got going again, the runners I'd been following had vanished into the mist, but a couple more came by and I latched on to them down to the checkpoint. From there it

was a massively steep ascent up to Scafell. Here I realised I had lost my watch; presumably it was knocked off the quick-release strap when I fell. Along the ridge to Slight Side where there the route dropped off the ridge and turned back towards the start. The group I was following turned left off the ridge. The race map warned of descending too soon in order to avoid crags, and I had a decision to make; should I follow the group, or follow my own instincts and continue further along the ridge before turning off.



Route up from Foxes Tarn

I decided to trust my judgement and continued along the ridge a little before heading off to the left. The descent was steep but thankfully avoided the crags and it was a relief to finally drop out of the clouds. I could see no other runners now, and I had no idea of time any more, but it was surprisingly liberating – now it was just down to me to find my way home across the wilderness landscape. Looking down into the valley I recognised a big bend in the river from the map so I set a compass bearing and set off. It was tiring terrain – marshy with grassy tussocks – so slow going.

After crossing the river I took a new compass bearing up to the saddle between Stonesty Pike and Cold Pike, and continued; the going getting increasingly steep as I approached the top. From the saddle I had a good view of the surrounding hills, the cloud having now lifted from most of the tops, but I was a bit in doubt about which was Pike O'Blisco – the last peak on the route. I went a bit higher to see if I could get a better view and saw a couple of walkers. I went over and checked with them where we were, and so was able to take a new bearing over to Pike O'Blisco. Now it was clear which way to go, and so I set off with a new confidence. As I got closer I was able to pick up the main path to the top. A steep climb was followed by a steep descent – rocky to start with but then I was able to take a grassy nose all the way down to the bottom. Then across a stream, through a couple of farm gates and there was the finish line.

I'd missed the presentations (winning time 02:55:48), but there was still plenty of cake left. My time was somewhat slower – 5:14:46. I wasn't quite last, 49 of 51 finishers, but I still felt a sense of achievement. It definitely hadn't been an easy day out, and I felt I'd come through it relatively unscathed (apart from scrapes and bruises and a lost GPS watch).

You can see the route here; <http://www.kendalac.co.uk/index.php?page=191>