

THE BIG DAY - 9th JUNE 2000

When we arrived in Keswick mid-afternoon, I thought the hills had vanished but unfortunately they were shrouded by a heavy veil of mist. With conditions so wet, I would have to wear the fell shoes after all.

Leg 1; Keswick to Threlkeld - 12.3 miles - 3 peaks - 5,116 feet.

Mandy, set off at 6.00 pm followed by Barry and myself, plus 2 navigators and 2 support at 6.30 pm. Our schedule was 22hrs 23 mins, which allowed us time to get under 24 hrs, even with the odd problem or two. We set off in dry weather but the mood changed as we started climbing Skiddaw in mist, rain and into a biting wind. The stream crossing after Great Calva was a raging torrent, but our decision where to cross was decided for us when our navigator slipped off the bank upto his thighs. We joined hands to cross, making sure we did not loose anybody. As we crossed Mungrisdale Common to Blencathra the mist suddenly lifted revealing the scree at the back of the fell, making our path to the summit very much easier. The ridge of Blencathra was very slippy and slow going, causing us to arrive in Threlkeld slightly behind schedule.

Leg 2; Threlkeld to Dunmail - 14.0 miles - 12 peaks - 6,003 feet.

My whole reason for wanting this particular weekend was so Chris Rhodes or Richard Calder would be available to navigate the night section as I had complete confidence in them in bad conditions. When we left Threlkeld and I was told Chris was injured I immediately was on a 'downer'. Rob Shaw however, did an excellent job in terrible conditons and at very short notice. It is with great credit to him that we completed the section at all.

There was not much to see on the Helvellyn range due to the "clag", but as we ran down a sandy path somewhere between Whiteside and Raise, we nearly jumped out of our skins when a large yellow bulldozer appeared out of the mist directly in our path. We missed the preferred route from Dollywagon down to Grisedale Tarn which cost us some time and then found ourselves on the wrong path from Fairfield. As we climbed Seat Sandal the sky brightened enabling us to switch off the torches at last.

Leg 3; Dunmail to Wasdale - 16.5 miles - 15 peaks - 6,147 feet.

I was still 'down' as we left Dunmail, but Pete Redhead picked up my spirits by telling me we had made up 9 minutes on the climb to Steel Fell. (I later found out this was a load of bull....!). With good light now and a chatty support team the summits rolled by with little problem. Mark Hartell was constantly feeding us sweets and cake to keep up the energy levels. As we approached Bowfell the mist was thick again and we took a different route to the one intended, resulting in us scrambling up a gully which was more suited to rock climbers than runners. We expected Broadstand to be roped, but not surprisingly John Amies considered this too dangerous, so we took the tedious route via Lords Rake. I climbed to Scafell summit quite strongly and descended down to Wasdale as the sun came out and the hills all became visible

Leg 4; Wasdate to Honister - 10.5 miles - 9 peaks - 6,141 feet.

Although I was now a hour and 13 mins down on the schedule, I had been promised there was plenty of slack in the tail, I was now going to test that theory out. Barry dropped back with his pacer and support, but I felt quite good and pushed on up Yewbarrow in glorious sunshine, the clear skies giving me renewed confidence. Only one big climb left now and Great Gable was fairly ominous in the distance. The smoke and chimneys from Sellafield were now clearly visible to our left. While climbing the red gully up Kirk Fell we noticed a tent pitched next to the stream at the bottom of Black Sail pass. I casually remarked it was possibly a checkpoint for the Ennerdale fell race and jokingly said, "What would we do if we were suddenly confronted by 200 plus runners?" We had no sooner reached the grassy plateau before Kirk Fell summit when fell runners were descending on us at breakneck pace led by Gavin Bland (who else?).

I was now 'flying' and at Honister pass was only 36 mins down on the schedule.

Leg 5; Honister to Keswick - 10.6 miles - 3 peaks - 2,421 feet.

Having been informed that Mandy was only 15 minutes ahead I briskly climbed Dale Head and followed the well trodden path to Hindscarth, leaving my navigator trailing in my wake. After some tricky scrambles down Robinson we saw Mandy and entourage in the distance and took off in hot pursuit, catching her just before Snab Farm, where we replaced the fell shoes with road shoes for the final 6 miles. The road really sorts out the tired muscles and we slowly jogged back to Keswick together, touching the Moot Hall at 5.02 pm in 22 hrs 32 mins and a long held ambition achieved. Mandys' time was 23 hrs 2mins and Barry kept moving efficiently enough to finish in 23 hr 40 mins.

After a shower at the B & B it was off to the George Hotel for some well earned beers.