

The Dales Way Challenge

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Report by Lucas Payne

My brother walked the Dalesway with a big group of pals, probably 20 years ago. It took them four days. Not bad considering the amount of ale they got through and kit they were carrying. He jumped into the lake at the finish and no one else did, which has stuck with me. I thought at the time, wow I would love to do that none stop.

The years rolled by and as luck would have it, the Ultra running organisers 'Punk Panther' had this race on their website, so I entered. The difference being that the race starts in the Lakes and finishes in Ilkley. A great way round finishing in an area we all know.

In terms of training, as usual an odd long run and then a few weeks ago, the 3 peaks tourist route.

I fancied having some support en-route and just happened to mention it to Graham and Pat. Next news they were on-board -fantastic - they know running, they know the route and we had loads of fun planning it out.

Having packed loads too much stuff, we set off for Bowness. The roads were clear so it was a lovely drive.

Once registered I got my tracker and number. It was great listening to the other runners. Most of them, by the way, looked like seasoned professionals, with running poles and all sorts of fancy kit.

Was I nervous? Yes ... 82 miles at any pace seemed a long way to me.

I had a plan, steady start, steady middle, finish positively.

It was also nice to see Karen Hood and Sue Marshal at the start, they looked super chilled out.

No one got silly at the start, steady away and in no time the field had spread out. On the first 2 legs I got into a group with a bunch of bad lads who were a tad too quick. I let them go and then did my own thing thankfully. The running was going well until mile 20 when I got cramp in my inner thigh. I have had this before, it never goes away and I thought that's me finished. Anyway I relaxed and it never came back thank goodness. But it was in the back on my mind though.

Got to Dent eventually, had some more snap then got back on it. A fellow runner gave me some salt tablets which was much appreciated. I took a wrong turn soon after, then hit my head on a tree, then caught a toe and smacked my knee in a muddy ditch. I thought, "Come on, concentrate laddie".

The tarmac section under the stone viaduct bridge out of Dent was a pig, as was the hill up to the highest point in the race around Cam High Road. Dropping down to Outershaw was OK but dreadfully boggy.

You then follow the river Wharfe down the valley and the views are some of the best out there with the water running over the limestone river beds. You get a lot of time to reflect and soak it all in, which is very different to an eye balls out fell race.

Big does and little does, I hit Kettlewell, after running through so much deep water and mud. It was dark but all my buddies and family were there, what a treat. During the night section you can have people with you for safety but they cannot physically support. Two pals joined me. They thought it was great fun keeping up with me quite easily for a change.

Grassington appeared out of the dark. I knew I was going to finish, the question was, how long ... the goal was 24 hours. At this point, a young lad was following me. His watch containing his map ran out of juice and he knew that I was confident in the route, so we continued as a pair. We finished together in just over 21 hours. I pushed him, which was nice as it gave me something to concentrate on.

I kept the same socks/trainers/shorts on throughout and just added a Morino top and jacket at night. My hands swelled up as did my feet, ankles and knees.

If you look at the leg times I had a steady start and went downhill slowly with a final flourish near the finish, not the plan, ho hum.

My mistakes and what did I learn?

Support is fantastic. Get it if you can, when you do a long race like this. I cannot tell you how nice it is to see people you know and I had this all the way. You know who you are, many thanks.

Train properly, I suggest lots of days out walking to get hours and hours into your feet. Only the top runners run most of it.

Try different food and find something you can eat when you cannot face food. I stopped munching at Grassington and it nearly killed me running on red for hours, just drinking pop. I fancy trying pre-soaked muesli blended with extra milk.

I think everyone got round or was rescued without any serious miss-haps, which is great news!

Finally, a big big thank you to everyone involved, lots of selfless people give up their valuable time to make these things possible 😊

Lucas Payne