

THE LAKES 2,500 FEET SUMMITS
BY JOHN EASTWOOD

The idea of doing all the Lake District's 2,500 feet summits as a continuous walk goes to Eustace Thomas when in the early 1920s he spent five days on the walk, spending the nights in pubs and hotels.

As far as is known, no other attempt was made until Ted Dance had the idea of doing the 2,500s, as a continuous walk in 1954. I assume that very few plans were made for this attempt. I have no doubt that these consisted of a brief look at the map, filling his rucksack with fruit and a few sandwiches and off he went. After an extremely fast 19 hours in which he covered about one-third of the walk, he was forced to give up due to hunger.

The next attempt was in 1967. Shortly after having completed our walk over the Scottish 4,000-foot summits Stan Bradshaw and myself were approached by Ted who suggested that we should have a go at the Lakes 2,500s in August. We set out from Coniston on a damp and foggy August Bank Holiday Saturday morning in good spirits and started knocking off the summits. After some nine hours of walking, the mist had lifted and as we walked from Glaramara to Esk Pike we noticed dark storm clouds rolling over the hills towards us. At the sight of these I decided to drop straight down to Wasdale. Ted and Stan pressed on over the Scafell Group in what turned out to be an exceptionally rough night which proved to be more than we could cope with.

Our next attempt was to be at Whitsuntide, 1968. On this occasion our planning was far more thorough and we enlisted the support of Len Stubbs. Our definition of a summit was a point on the map shown by a 50 feet contour line or a point that is well known. We counted a total of 77 summits making a walk of 105 miles with 43,065 feet of ascent. The party was increased to five thanks to Dennis Weir and Donald Talbot.

We set out from High Moss at 7.10 Saturday, 1st June. The weather was perfect and we went extremely well over Dow Crag Old Man, Bow Fell, etc., arriving at the Three Shires Stone fifty minutes ahead of schedule. This caught our support on the hop: however a substantial lunch was soon rustled up. Forty-five minutes later we were heading for Long Top and Crinkle Crag and many tops later High White Stones. We ran from the summit to Langstrath Beck, where we had a forty-five minutes' break and the chance to consume vast quantities of orange juice, butties and fruit cake. At 15.45 hours, Saturday, we headed straight up the steep slopes of Glaramara and then Esk Pike. It had been a hot day and we had lost a lot of sweat so we were pleased when the sun started to go down. We enjoyed the cooler evening and we also enjoyed having popular mountains like Great End and Scafell to ourselves. A brisk run from Long Green to Brackenclough and we were able to put our feet up and enjoy a rest and a meal. One hour thirty-five minutes later at 23.30 hours Saturday we headed up Dore Head to Red Pike. A complaint had been lodged with Ted about the speed. Ted agreed to go slower but we proceeded at much the same speed as before. Halfway up Dore Head Donald decided to return to Wasdale. A warm still night, eight more peaks and four more hours found us at Pillar Rock. We were all feeling tired and I don't think we got the best out of what should have been one of the more interesting parts of the walk. At 4.30 we had breakfast at Blacksail Pass. Dennis Weir returned to the valley with our support party whilst Ted, Stan and myself headed for Kirkfell and the Gables.

As we headed towards Haystacks the day warmed up and I became very tired, finally, I insisted on having a sleep. We all lay down on the soft heather and fell asleep immediately.

Twenty minutes later I awoke to find that Ted and Stan had gone and were now out of sight. I didn't like the idea of having them ahead of me so pressed on with all haste and finally caught up on the summit of High Stile. After a short debate as to which was the highest of the two summits we did them both to make sure and then straight down to Buttermere by 12.05 Sunday. We changed our clothes and had a meal in the busy car park outside "The Fish" then headed for Keswick via the six summits of the Grasmere Group. Our support party motored to Keswick to book a meal for us and then round to Braithwaite to meet us as we came off Grisedale Pike. We took our time getting into Keswick, had a meal and a rest and headed for Skiddaw at 21.50 Sunday. It turned into a cold wet night and the walk from Skiddaw to Blencathra seemed endless. I had my doubts about the reliability of the compass but we finally reached Blencathra as the sun was rising. It was obvious we had lost about one hour on our scheduled time so we jogged down to Threlkeld, arriving at 05.09 Monday. We shook our support party's car vigorously, got them onto the road-side cooking breakfast whilst we leapt inside for a quick rest. By 8 o'clock the sun was very warm, the sky was cloudless and we could see it would stay that way all day. This was a most enjoyable day as a great number of the peaks were new to me, we had ideal views and the walking was easy underfoot. Between Helvellyn and Grisedale Tarn was the only area on the walk where we met large numbers of walkers.

We had been going well all morning but as we ascended St. Sunday Crag the pace seemed to get hotter. After a rapid circuit of the Fairfield Group we descended from Red Screes to the Kirkstone Inn at a run. I could see Stan a mere speck in the distance walking onto the Inn carpark and Ted about mid-way between us as I was still picking my way over the slippery boulders high up the mountain side. Chicken and chips all round and at 20.45 Monday we started up Stoney Cove Pike, the first of the High Street Group. From the Kirkstone Inn we were rejoined by Donald Talbot; he kindly offered to show us the way and carry a rucksack containing our pullovers, torches, etc. As we walked from Thornthwaite Crag to Harter Fell the weather started to deteriorate and soon it was misty and raining quite hard. By this time we were very tired, we had a sensation of walking through trees and the stones in cairns appeared to spin. Kidsty Pike took a lot of finding even though Donald and Stan seemed to know every stone and wall on the mountain; they also gave a magnificent exhibition of the latest orienteering techniques but we finally had to admit defeat when we couldn't find High Rise. Stan and myself had a sleep on short grass whilst Donald and Ted carried on the search for High Rise. At sunrise the rain stopped and the clouds cleared; High Rise was now no problem. 04.20 Tuesday and we were on the summit feeling elated at having nearly completed the walk. Ramsgill Head and a jog down to Low Hartstop and the end of the walk at 05.00 Tuesday. This just gave Ted enough time for a quick breakfast before he returned to Manchester to start a day's work at 9 o'clock.