

Pikes of the Lakes

"I wonder how many fells there are with the word 'Pike' in?" asked Beth, my wife, whilst poring over maps one evening.

So began the conversation that would turn into my major challenge for 2017. Turns out the answer is a lot. Hmm, ok, but what if we raised the height bar, to 600m, say? This sort of thing is fairly easy these days with websites that list all fells, heights, etc. Still a lot! How about 700m?

And there it was... a stunning big horseshoe covering most of Lakeland, from Kentmere in the south east, up to the north behind Blencathra, and back down the western side.

After some further proper mapwork, tracing out the best route between summits, I had devised the full route – adding in a couple of Pikes that it would be rude to miss and a few more at the end that were local favourites. Some basic calculations put this at about 95 miles and somewhere in the region of 12,000m (40,000ft) of climb. I had never run this far, so worked out a rough schedule based on my Ramsay Round pace from the year before and we decided to set a 'reasonable' time limit of 36 hours.

A summer out and about in the fells gave me a chance to recce most of the bits I didn't know, and now I just needed to pull my finger out and get on with it!

The first weekend I decided on ended up being a wild one. I was still tempted just to get on with it, but the rattling windows in the house persuaded me to wait...

And so finally the first weekend in September rolled around, with a perfect

weather forecast and rested legs from a week of little running. Beth was brilliant and wanted to support me all the way round, meeting me at various road crossings. A few others had thought they might be able to join me for a run, but I was prepared to go it alone if needed.

The drive over Hardknott and Wrynose passes at sunrise was stunning, and whilst the night before I had felt a bit apprehensive about this challenge, on the morning I was simply keen to get on with it – and a little bit sleepy if I'm honest! On previous 24 hour challenges, I've always set a start time and been keen to stick to it, especially with a schedule in hand and any support times agreed. But this time, whilst we had aimed to start at 07:30, arriving a little late didn't really bother me – it felt more like just going out for a long run.

So at 07:45 I pulled on my pack, had a quick photo by the church in Kentmere, said "see you in a bit" to Beth, and set off on a steady trot out to Kentmere Pike.

It was a beautiful morning, and I had to try hard to slow myself down on this first bit. I met another early riser having breakfast on the first summit, and had a really enjoyable run out to Kidsty Pike, perched above Riggindale. Then it was back and onto the Hodgson Leg 2 relay route over to Stony Cove Pike and down to Kirkstone Pass.

I was feeling great in the morning sun at this point, and whilst not particularly hungry, I forced down a small pie and restocked for the next leg. I also realised my rudimentary schedule was quite slow – I was

At the start - still smiling



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already well over an hour ahead! Sadly this meant I missed Harvey who ran out to join me and seemingly spent a couple of hours running all over this area looking for me...

Pip and Mae, our two dogs, joined me for the next leg – a long one all the way to Threlkeld. After a steep climb up Red Screes to get the legs moving again, we had a largely uneventful but very pleasant run out over Fairfield, Cofa Pike and out to Gavel Pike, before returning and running the full length of the Helvellyn ridge. Despite forcing myself to take it steady, I was moving along well here and was still gaining time on my schedule. We skirted around a couple of the bumps on this ridge, and

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Perfect evening on Ullock Pike

visited Calfhow Pike just because it's on the route. Pip took a dislike to the paragliders on Clough Head, but he failed to scare them away; we dropped down the steep grassy face and trotted along the road to the cricket club in Threlkeld for a very early dinner.

Leg 3 started with the steep but thoroughly enjoyable climb up Halls Fell ridge onto Blencathra. I was feeling a bit over-fed on pasta and when I'm a bit full I always start to feel sleepy! So I stuck as much to the rocky crest of the ridge as I could in an aim to make it more interesting and wake myself up. Any clouds that had been around during the day had completely disappeared by now and it was a beautiful trot out to Atkinson Pike, then down towards Skiddaw House. I'd used the recent Old Crown Round race as a recce for this section, but got a much nicer line with the, um, slightly better weather this time around!

The climb up towards Lonscale Pike took me out of the gentle breeze for a bit, and a distinctly Scottish swarm of midges appeared from nowhere. Running for over 30 hours alone is one thing, but midges are a different game altogether! I put my head down and powered up to the ridge and back into the breeze. The rough contour round Skiddaw led to the brilliantly runnable ridge out to Ullock Pike. Another one that doesn't quite make the 700m mark, but given its position on the round, the stunning view from it, and very evocative name (meaning 'Peak where the Wolves play' in Old Norse), it felt right to include this one.

The descent from here was one section I hadn't recce'd, and I took a straight line through the heather for a while, cutting back down towards the track that then led me to the road.

I had planned to follow the marked footpath across the fields to reach Braithwaite, but came across a sign informing me that the bridge at Bog House was out of action. Oh. This wasn't in the plan, and it looked like a long way round, mostly on road. A quick study of the map showed a couple of other possible options, so I decided to go for it anyway – how deep could the river really be?! The path quickly petered out in a huge cow field, and with evening mist descending on the valley I took a quick bearing and trudged on across the boggy land. Eventually I found the bridge, which was indeed very out of order, and well barred off, preventing a quick swim. About 5 minutes later, whilst trotting along the track to the next bridge, my phone buzzed with a text – 'the bridge at Bog House is out!'

Braithwaite couldn't come soon enough – the sun had set by now and a chill had started to set in. The sight of Beth with a chair, warm jacket, food and hot coffee at



A welcome dawn from Scafell Pike

PHOTO © TIM RIPPER

the ready was very welcome.

I took my time at this stop, changing socks, eating well, re-packing my bag and giving my legs a quick massage. A couple of minutes before I was ready to leave, our friend Rhys turned up on his bike – he had sent the text earlier and had been cycling round the alternative route looking out for me. It was great to see a friendly face and to get the unexpected support. He pointed out that my route was almost exactly the same distance and climb as the UTMB, which was

also going on that weekend, but probably a few hundred pounds cheaper and certainly less crowded! I'll have to go there one day to compare the experiences...

The climb up Grisedale Pike is always a long one, as anyone who's raced the Coledale Horseshoe will tell you, but I quite enjoy this sort of climb. You get your head down, keep moving and if you give it a good 10 minutes before looking up you suddenly seem to have made a lot of progress. The evening view back over Keswick, with the



18 hours in

PHOTO © BETH RIPPER



moon rising, was genuinely stunning.

The rest of this leg passed in a steady plod really – it was dark and I had slowed down a little, and there was some mist coming in over the fells. The gentle scramble out to Ladyside Pike and back was fun, and I always

love the long fast descent off Whiteless Pike into Buttermere.

Beth was again here waiting, although the rest of the village was very quiet. I had a quick bite to eat but wanted to keep moving as it was definitely cold by now.

After 17 hours on the go and over 120 miles of driving, Beth was hit with a very helpfully timed bout of morning sickness (it was gone 11pm!). I was keen that she made it home safely soon as well and managed to get some sleep before meeting me in Wasdale the next morning.

From Buttermere was the roughest section of the route, and I would be doing it through the middle of the night. A relentlessly steep climb on the partly stone-flagged path led to the screes and finally the top of Red Pike, and with the clag firmly set in I took a bearing for the trackless descent into Ennerdale. I'd recce'd this part a few weeks before and was very happy to nail the line down to the gate, and then plodded up the track to the bridge over the River Liza. From here it was a very rough trod up through the forestry land, very unlike anything on the rest of the round. A sneaky animal trod I knew of took me directly up through the forest and back up to the high fell. I was beginning to feel very weary on the climb up White Pike, with questioning and doubting thoughts flying at me from all directions. It was also getting more windy and cold. But making it up to Pillar and back on to 'home turf' was a great morale booster and as the clouds cleared away I soaked in the night time silhouettes of the fells, with the bottomless black hole of Wasdale below. I hoped the single light I could see was Beth!

It turns out it wasn't Beth – she had missed her alarm call leading to a frantic race up to Wasdale. Fortunately she made it with a few minutes to spare, and had she not told me this I would have assumed

Leg	Distance (km)	Distance (m)	Elevation (m)	Cum dist (m)	Cum elev (m)	Leg time (hrs)
1	20.18	12.54	1,434	12.5	1,434	5.02
2	27.5	17.09	2,030	29.6	3,464	6.84
3	24.7	15.35	1,829	45.0	5,293	6.14
4	12.63	7.85	1,300	52.8	6,593	3.14
5	16.7	10.38	1,721	63.2	8,314	4.15
6	39.5	24.54	3,614	87.7	11,928	9.82
						35.10

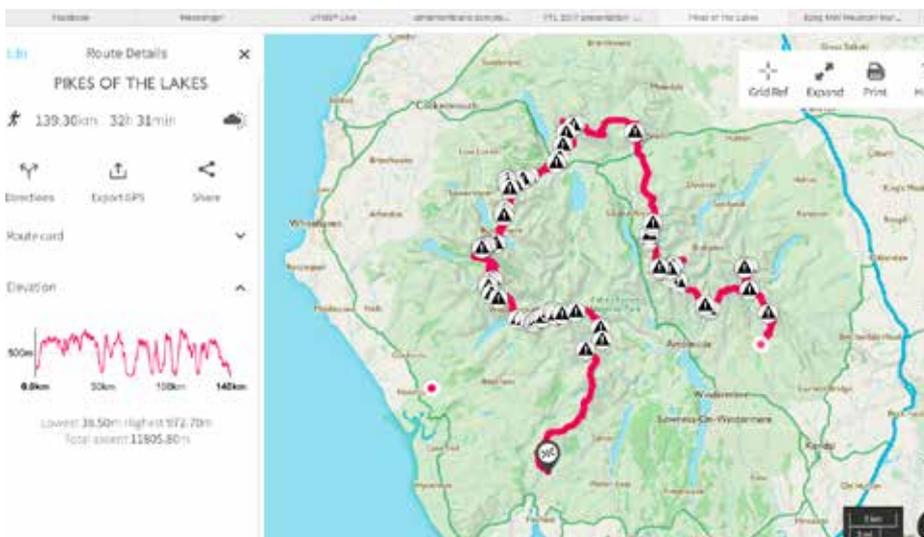




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Pip and Mae on the Fells

it was all under control – a perfect road support team!

The very welcome dawn was breaking as I neared the top of Scafell Pike, to also be greeted by a Three Peaker with the words “Two down one to go now mate!” Yep, something like that...

The sunrise brought my appetite back to life (I’d struggled to eat much over the last 6 or 7 hours), and whilst it helped that I was now on familiar ground, I was also starting to get sore feet. Flat running was fine, but any twisting on tussocks was starting to hurt more than it should – I still had a long way to go! It turns out that the red/black racing Walsh’s aren’t ideal for 100 miles...

I reversed much of the Bob Graham route out to Pike o’ Stickle, then descended the steep way directly into Langdale. The ODG pub was extremely tempting, but I resisted and managed a gentle run along the road until the start of the relentlessly steep climb up Pike of Blisco. It was late morning now, and despite being September it was HOT! Only four hours ago I’d been shivering in the early dawn, but now I was dripping and there was no breeze to be felt anywhere. I stopped for a cool down in the beck, then decided that sitting around wouldn’t get me anywhere so carried on and eventually, as is always the way, the top arrived. A direct line took me straight to the top of Cold Pike, and the tussocky line off certainly wasn’t comfortable, but over seven hours from Wasdale, I met Beth again at the Three Shires stone for some much needed lunch.

Beth offered me some plasters for the blisters that had ripped open, but I

mumbled something along the lines of “pain is pain, doesn’t matter if it has a plaster on it” and pulled my shoes back on ready to go. I was hoping the dogs would both join me to the finish, but Pip took one look at me setting off up the hill, looked back at Beth, and promptly jumped back in the car. He’s a wise dog! Mae is still young and hasn’t learnt yet, so she bounded excitedly up the fell in front of me.

From here the route was mostly on the Duddon fell race line, a favourite of mine and I knew it well. Whilst it was still a long

way to go, the terrain was more runnable again. I actually managed to pick up pace and surprised myself by running along all of the traverse round the side of Brim Fell, before struggling up to Dow Crag. The ridge route led me along to Buck Pike, the last of my 700m ‘pikes’.

I’d been told I might at this point regret my ‘additional pikes’ at the end, but I do genuinely love running the Dunnerdale fells and with the end almost in sight I had renewed enthusiasm on the run over White Pike. The traverse of Caw did seem to go on



Made it to the last Pike!

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PIKES OF THE LAKES		SCHEDULE	ACTUAL
LEG 1	Dep Kent' Church	7:30	7:42
Distance (km) 20.18	Kentmere Pike		8:33
Distance (m) 12.54	Kidsty Pike		9:33
Elevation (m) 1,434	Stony Cove Pike		10:25
Leg Time (hrs) 5.02	Arr Kirkstone Pass	12:30	10:52
LUNCH			
LEG 2	Dep Kirkstone Pass	12:45	11:04
Distance (km) 27.5	Cofa Pike		12:28
Distance (m) 17.09	Gavel Pike		12:54
Elevation (m) 2,030	Dollwaggon Pike		13:42
Leg Time (hrs) 6.84	Nethermost Pike		13:55
	Calfhow Pike		15:09
	Arr Threlkeld	19:30	15:51
DINNER			
LEG 3	Dep Threlkeld		16:09
Distance (km) 24.7	Atkinson Pike		17:05
Distance (m) 15.35	Lonscale Pike		18:01
Elevation (m) 1,829	Ullock Pike		18:51
Leg Time (hrs) 6.14	Arr Braithwaite	1:30	20:12
COFFEE			
LEG 4	Dep Braithwaite	1:40	20:32
Distance (km) 12.63	Grisedale Pike		21:28
Distance (m) 7.85	Ladyside Pike		21:59
Elevation (m) 1,300	Whiteless Pike		22:47
Leg Time (hrs) 3.14	Arr Buttermere	4:45	23:14
COFFEE			
LEG 5	Dep Buttermere	5:00	23:30
Distance (km) 16.7	Red Pike (Buttermere)		0:29
Distance (m) 10.38	White Pike		2:30
Elevation (m) 1,721	Red Pike (Wasdale)		3:21
Leg Time (hrs) 4.15	Arr Wasdale Head	9:00	4:19
BREAKFAST			
LEG 6	Dep Wasdale Head	9:15	4:42
Distance (km) 39.5	Scafell Pike		6:12
Distance (m) 24.54	Esk Pike		7:04
Elevation (m) 3,614	Pike de Bield		7:17
Leg Time (hrs) 9.82	Rossett Pike		7:47
	Pike of Stickle		8:48
	Pike of Blisco		10:45
	Cold Pike		11:18
	Arr Three Shires	14:00	11:41
	Dep Three Shires		12:01
	Hell Gill Pike		12:31
	Buck Pike		13:41
	Brown Pike		13:51
	White Pike		14:10
	Stickle Pike		15:37
	Arr Broughton Mills	18:30	16:10
FINISH			

forever, but eventually I reached Kiln Bank cross, where Beth was waiting to cheer me on. I didn't stop really, just shovelled in a handful of Pringles and headed on to struggle up the final climb of Stickle Pike. It was a clear afternoon and much of the route was visible from here so I took a moment to savour the views. Whilst I was keen to set a good time, this wasn't a race.

From Stickle it was the straightest line I could run down off the fells and through the fields to Broughton Mills. Anyone who's raced Dunnerdale will know the brutal uphill road at the end. But even after 108 miles, I was so keen to finish that I managed to find the energy to run all the way to the pub, and finally collapsed into a chair in the sunshine – 33 hours and 28 minutes after leaving Kentmere. Even better, after just as long driving around the fells supporting, Beth had even managed to get there first and have a pint waiting for me!

A simple thought that sparked an idea had finally led to a brilliant long run out in the fells. I really enjoyed doing something different – making my own route, linking the fells I know so well in some very different ways, and challenging myself to push on and keep moving through the tough bits. I ended up running it all solo (apart from a couple of bits the dogs joined me on) and one of the hardest but also best bits is spending so much time in your own thoughts!

Pikes of the Lakes wouldn't have existed without Beth first coming up with the idea, and the run certainly wouldn't have happened without her tireless support and encouragement – Thank You!

If anyone else likes the idea of this long tour round the Lakes, please let me know – I'll certainly meet you for a pint at the end, and may even join you for some of the running!



Complete!

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