

The Yorkshire Dales Top 10

The Yorkshire Dales top 10 is an 80 mile route with about 7200m in climb; it takes in the 10 highest peaks in the national park. I got the idea for the route from a book of the same name by Brian Smailes. I had run the route before but over two days, with an overnight bivvy near High Seat. This was for training for the SLMM a few years ago. As the team I entered into this years High Peak Marathon didn't get a place I found myself with a free weekend, so thought I would give it a go in under 24 hours. I decided to start and finish in Horton, and asked around but nobody fancied it so did it solo unsupported.

I set off from Horton on a cloudy Saturday afternoon; first top was Pen Y Ghent. The steps up were clear of ice and there wasn't a great deal of snow on the top. I dropped down the back of Pen Y Ghent and straight over Fountains Fell. My route then took me via Arncliffe and Kettlewell, heading for my second top of Great Whernside. Much more snow here, there was snow on the ground from about the scout hut onwards. The sun had set, the sky had cleared and the temperature was dropping very quickly. The climb up Buckden Pike (3rd top) was a slog, the snow hadn't frozen solid yet, so I trudged up with my legs going through the ice every few steps. Upon reflection this was my low point.

I ran through Hawes at about 01:30, very quiet and still! The moon came up as I started up Great Shunner Fell (4th), the top is a desolate place on a good day. The temperature had dropped enough for the snow to freeze solid all the way to High Seat (5th). This section was a fantastic, such a still, cold, quiet and clear night; I could see the light of what I think must have been Middlesbrough in the distance.

The sky started to get light as I came down from High Seat and the sun was up by the time I got to the top of Swarth Fell (6th). At this point the route turns roughly south and starts heading for Horton, This would have given me a lift if I had needed one. I had had a good last few hours and I was in great sprits, I was eating well and feeling strong. The only niggling doubt was the clock and the whole 24 hours thing.

There are a couple of semi long road sections before Dent; these were even Ok in the morning sun. I chatted to a cyclist, the first person I had seen since Pen Y Ghent. He said he was envious that I had run through the night, I thought he had a right to be as it was such a good night to run through. The climb up to Crag Hill (7th) and Great Coum (8th) went slow, but they are really the same hill with only a flat ½ mile between tops. This left me only 2 descents and 2 accents over Whernside (9th) and Inglebrough (10th). I had well over 5 hours left but still felt the need to push.

It was turning into a lovely day and Whernside was predictably busy. It was nice to turn my map reading side of my brain off and just enjoy the last few hours. The zig zag path up Inglebrough was a wall of ice, with only other peoples toe holes to put your feet. This was the only time when I thought a fall could have been serious. Thirza and Dave were on the top enjoying a good day, I chatted to them for a while as I had almost 3 hours left. I trotted down feeling pretty good considering, taking my time and enjoying the sun.

I finished in a time of 22 hours 33 minutes. I felt I had been very lucky with the weather so early in the year. The good visibility meant navigation was not really a factor. My diet of pork pies, nuts, sweets and chocolate and been easy to eat and keep down. All in all a good day out.

Johnnie Watson

Start, Horton in Ribblesdale	16:32
Peak 1, Pen Y Ghent	17:10
Peak 2, Great Whernside	20:35
Peak 3, Buckden Pike	22:28
Peak 4, Great Shunner Fell	03:38
Peak 5, High Seat	05:01
Peak 6, Swarth Fell	07:02
Peak 7, Crag Hill	10:55
Peak 8, Great Coum	11:05
Peak 9, Whernside	12:09
Peak 10, Ingleborough	13:41
Finish, Horton in Ribblesdale	15:05