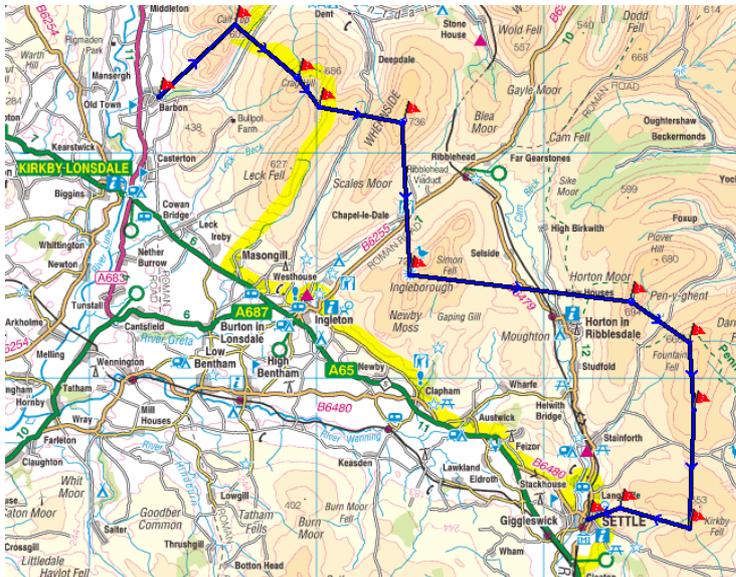


The Dales Skyline

by Duncan Elliott of Bowland Fellrunners



The route of the Dales Skyline

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's mountains! But I had done for some time. Bowland is a brilliant place for solitude, emptiness and peat but it lacks in altitude. Often I had glanced across, perhaps leered, at the peaks of the Dales. From the pinnacle of 1707 east of Fairsnape Fell the tops of Crag Hill, Gragareth, Whernside, Ingleborough, Pen y Ghent and Fountains Fell always looked inviting - a land of eastern promise! To the south of Fountains a less conspicuous skyline lurked behind Settle and around Malham. South of Settle the skyline dwindles into the Aire valley and then continues south along the Pennine way into Ickornshaw Moor. Running on the summit of Bowland at Wards Stone the same skyline loomed north and eastwards and a route idea began to beckon! After a lot of map fondling the structure of the route began to form. The logistics also began to gel. I really enjoy linear routes and have used buses a lot in Wales when reccyng the Paddy Buckley. Despite being a linear route I could not get to Barbon Church from Settle so it would have to be a two car route, but an easy one. I mentioned the idea to Andy Crook and we agreed to have a go.

August 2009 and the western monsoon together with an operation for Andy and a quad injury to me left 2009 unfulfilled.

In October I had a reccy of the last section of the route by catching the train from Settle to Horton and then running back over Pen y Ghent, Fountains, and the lonely trig point on Malham Moor, Capon Hall and instead of taking the Settle Loop bridleway into Settle had continued to Ryeloaf Hill. Wainwright included it in his 'Walks in Limestone Country' and once at the summit it was an obvious top to finish on and I descended along the wall towards the old radio station at High Greet. Unfortunately the wall was 4ft high with barbed wire and no stile. This would not be a good route after 30 miles of running. Another wall at the broken down radio station was also precarious to cross without the damage inflicted by a lumbering fell runner. So I planned a descent off Ryeloaf down to Stockdale Lane. That was until I mentioned it to Ian Roberts the week before and he reckoned we should include the trig point near Attermire Scar. It seemed like a good idea so into the route Warrendale Knotts trig point went.

So on Easter Sunday we met in Settle at 7 am and drove to Barbon. It was a lovely spring day as we set off up the lovely grassy trods to Calf Top. To the west winter still clung to the Lakes and snow neck laced the far eastern fells. We took it steady to the summit and then plummeted down to the Barbon Road crossing the dried up stream bed at Short Gill Bridge. Up the wall on the northern side was the best going and we followed a good path to the waterfalls at Short Gill. After this we gradually ascended into sedge. Strangely subdued and flattened almost to a carpet. Not the result of ovine hyper obesity but more likely the weight of three months of snow patches it made the going easier and we were soon at the top.

I had last been here on Bowland Exploration Group run and further down we had winched Ian Roberts up onto the County Stone. Ahead lay Gragareth wreathed in clag and not an objective. Although Gragareth is generally regarded as the highest point in Lancashire

Green Hill is actually 1 metre higher. So inconspicuous is Green Hill that we ran past and had to use the GPS to locate it and its token cairn.

From here an easy descent on snow squashed sedge brought us to the Kingdale road and a steady climb up into the claggy ridge and Whernside. Andy was impressed with my bearing, which brought us out between the snowdrifts bob on the summit. Now the weather had decided to throw the frozen equivalent of peppercorns at us and we soon departed mentioning the BBC forecast and a word sounding similar to one used for young male cattle. No one cowering in the wind shelter seemed to object!

It was a pleasure to run along the ridge without the usual spasms of cramp that I always seem to get in the Three Peaks race and we were soon running down towards Bruntscar keeping right off the mud of the path. Still no cramp so I made the most of it and kept up a good pace.

At the Hill Inn we filled up with water from the caravan pitch and Andy plodded on whilst I ran across to the limekiln to retrieve the can of rice pudding that I had stashed the week before. We ate it on the move plodding up for what seemed the steepest climb of the day.

The top of the zigzags was still under snow and we wondered how the Bowland Bat Runners had got up here in the sheet ice of February. Today it was just cold with a sifting wind blowing over the trig and harvesting the walkers into the wind shelter

By Swine Tail I have normally skinned my feet so today was a pleasure and I set off at a fast pace to enjoy a normally painful trudge. A digger had been used to scrape the tops off the protruding stones and it made the path a lot easier to run on. We still kept to the grass and at Sulber just splashed through the ponds that carpeted the path. It was unusual not to feel knackered as I always have done in the race at this point and we ran off fast - Andy later said that he had hung on as I ran off like a whippet! A whippet that was about to have its legs put down at the vets!

We ran into Horton and Andy spotted a tap outside the public toilets. I had reccied this last weekend to find that there was only hot water to fill up with so I had decided we would use the farm tap if the farmer was not on the prowl. After a pit stop and feed we were off. Up the lane to Brackenclose I plodded and tailed Andy all the way up with my quads becoming very sore. Nurofen eventually helped but not in negotiating the sea of mud that we slithered up in all the way to the base of the cliffs. I rallied here at the sight of two terminal smokers who had probably spent most of the day getting here. At least I got past them. Finally we were at the wind blasted cairn and off cutting left after the first crags to descend and traverse through lapin sheltered housing.

I have always really enjoyed this section to the road at Dale Head but today it was tedious and we plodded up the road and the last big trudge up Fountains.

At the top the route off to the south summit to the west of the tarn can be difficult to spot but today we followed the markers and were soon descending above Tennant Gill farm. This was the site of another winter bat run where the 'Reverend' Roberts had been forced to give up in the drifts even with his natural talents as a human snowplough!



Malham Moor Trig

The next trig point on Malham Moor is a lovely lonely outpost looking west towards Stainforth and we were soon here keeping up a good trot on clear trods around the sinkholes. As the footpath goes right

we cut left across the field to the lane by Capon Hall. Here we stopped and ate watching the steady stream on Bank Holiday meanderers passing in their cars. Some form of communal ovine enjoyment!

Then we were off skirting Black Hill on a good trod and down to cross the Settle Loop. This next section eventually has a good trod to the west of the fallen wall but you need to climb over at the wall junction north east of Back Scar most other sections require scaling ladders. Then it's just a sort section in a limestone valley to the gate on the Settle Loop.

We contoured round following the wall on what in Wainwrights Guide had been a trespass but now is a good trod. Finally we are at our last summit looking down to Stockdale Lane and the route to Settle and the pub.

Off the nose slightly right we descended to the stream and easily crossed the wall where the bridleway descends. Then on along the lane where Andy had another tale of Ian getting lost in the snow and them sitting it out in the pub until he made an appearance (there's a lesson in here somewhere!)



Andy and me on Warrendale Knotts summit

And now for the last summit. Off the lane and we slithered through a field choreographed by Galloways with boots on. If they were not the culprits then we were looking for the contents of the Serengeti to reach this level of bombardment.

The crenulated skyline of Attermire and Warrendale Knotts was above us as we reached the last climb.

I plodded up the last steep climb and thanked Ian for suggesting such a lovely top to finish with. It was the last nail in a long day and my calf's feel like a nail gun has attacked them.

Finally I join Andy at the summit trig and it's worth it for the view. Andy suggests it would be good to get under 12 hours so the gap down through the crags we find is a welcome surprise. It leads down onto grass and then a lovely plummet down into the town to touch the Market Cross and finish in 11 hours 50 minutes.

A dream had been run and it had not been a bad one. This is a lovely natural line covering all the tops that can be seen along the southern skyline of the Dales and is much better run than just leered at! Then it was down to the Golden Lion where some strange event known as a bank holiday weekend had been taking place.

The details for are: 36 miles and 10 600 feet of ascent.