

NORTH DALES TRAVERSE REPORT by Rick Ansell

It was the weekend after a rather hot Ennerdale but I felt up for it and reasonably recovered. I camped in Sedbergh and in the morning drove over to Hawes, leaving my bike in my tent. The road was closed so my start time of 8.00 was delayed as I was forced to make a tour of the Dales to reach Hawes. As I drove round the lanes the cloudy sky rapidly cleared to reveal the prospect of another warm day; not ideal

I toddled off up the road out of Hawes feeling light and bouncy. It was warm already but as I climbed there was a breeze and a few clouds drifted up. The air was full of bird calls. The sounds pursued me all day, at times seeming to be a joyous celebration of a great summer's day, at others a cacophonous, intrusion into the concentration of my mind. There were curlews and golden plovers providing the backing vocals to the angry calls of lapwings as I passed through their nesting sites with occasional harmonies from pipits as they burst out from under my feet in alarm. I don't remember a day out on the hills with such a constant volume of bird sounds.

After a couple of hours I was dropping down into the top of Swaledale, following the Pennine Way for a kilometre or so. This was the best of hill running, quick effortless travel, with no pressure of competition; time to look around and appreciate the scenery. I realised that so much of my hill running is competitive, which, much as I enjoy it, reduces the time for really appreciating the places you pass through. These long solo runs done at your own pace provide more of an epicurean feast.

A hot tussocky climb to Rogan's Seat left me feeling a little less carefree. I stopped to eat a tin of rice pudding and wonder at a large military listening post on the summit. The tussocks continued to the road at Tan Hill. Water in the streams was scarce and where I found it was warm and viscous and failed to refresh. I felt drowsy in the heat and stopped to nap for five minutes in the heather. Gradually the Nine Standards came closer, and I reached the second phase of the run. The four tops along the Mallerstang Edge were close together and at last I felt I was able to tick things off quickly and without too much effort.

It was late afternoon as I dropped down to cross the Eden Valley and start the climb up to Wild Boar Fell. I was remembering last year's Capricorn which was held over these hills. I was in the discomfort zone now, just over the edge into dehydration and having to force feed myself; malt loaf wasn't the best choice perhaps. As long as I didn't degenerate further it would be OK but the carefree skipping along of the morning seemed to be of another lifetime. From West Baugh Fell I could almost see my tent in Sedbergh. It was tempting but with resolution I turned my back and headed north west on a long easy descent to face the Howgills.

I had always visualised climbing up into these hills in the late afternoon to finish off this run. It was late evening now, though, but with the climb below me I was still happy on the high, grassy ridges, alone in the dusk as lights began to glimmer in the villages around the skirts of the hills. The breeze was cold and I had to pull on a long-sleeved top. The light faded as I turned from Fell Head to make my way back towards The Calf and the final tops above Sedbergh but the white line of the path through the short grass was clear enough, seeming to hold onto the light the way a building holds the heat of the day and radiates it into the streets in the cool of the evening. I finally switched on my torch at 11.30 to pick my way over Bram Rigg Top and wearily down the path to the lights of the town.